

SCHOOLING IN MIRAMBIKA - A CASE STUDY

Major Findings

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A synoptic view of the various processes of schooling in Mirambika is presented with the aim of providing a functional and a descriptive account of the happenings in school. An attempt has been made to organise this write-up in a manner that it provides to the reader an understanding of the case i.e What makes Mirambika function as it does?

This study aims to provide an accurate indepth account of the organizational structure, culture and teaching-learning processes taking place in Mirambika. The interpretations of the observations were validated by triangulation. The findings of the study have been shared with Mirambika and Mother's International School which helped in establishing correspondence with their view. We are aware that the essence of qualitative research lies in presenting the findings such as to establish an empathetic understanding for the reader, through thick description, while retaining the context of events and to use narratives to optimize the opportunity of the reader to gain an experiential understanding of the case. The major findings presented here are a step towards achieving the final qualitative report.

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GLOSSARY

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GLOSSARY

Ashramites	· Teachers working on full-time basis and residing in the Ashram and are devotees of the Mother : Life time service to divine is their aim.
Clubs	: Co-curricular activities in school.
Diyas	: Teachers in school, word coined from <i>Didi</i> and <i>Bhaiya</i> .
Groups	· Synonym to 'classes' in other schools.
Living Museum	: Hall used for meetings, displays, exhibitions, meditation etc.
Neem Grove	: Area around the Neem tree in the school grounds, site for many activities.
Project Time	· Mornings when children work on themes, projects, topics.
Sand pit	· Sunken circular area in the courtyard filled with sand used for playing etc.
Topic Books	· Class work copies.
School Coordinator	· The Principal of the School.
Trainees	: Students pursuing B.Ed. (Affiliated to Indore University, Summer Course) and doing practice teaching in Mirambika.
Training Time	: Afternoons when formal teaching takes place
Friday Sharing	: Note-books maintained by children of their work.
Volunteers	: Part time teachers, working on voluntary basis.

Chapter 1

Background of the Study

Education in India can be traced to the vedic age, from the age of Upanishads, the Gita, the Buddhist and Jain scriptures, Smritis, etc., to the pre-post colonial systems of traditional education. Indian philosophers, according to Kabir (1961), regard education as essentially a process of drawing out what is implicit in the individual and to develop his latent potentialities till they become actualities. The philosophical thinking of eminent personalities like Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, J.Krishnamurti, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatama Gandhi, and others, have influenced the system of education in India. Gandhi's Basic Education scheme (*Bunyadi Talim*) formed the basis for various education committees which were formed during the independence period. For Gandhi, "true education is one in which the individual develops his character, trains his faculties, and learns to control his passions in the service of the community" (Kabir, 1971, P 202). Tagore focussed on education which seeks fulfilment through harmony with all things. He also felt that education to be truly creative, should be in full touch with the complete life of people-economic, intellectual, aesthetic, social and spiritual. Tagore and Gandhi believed that the aim of education is the total development of the human personality. Aurobindo too has placed emphasis on all round development of the personality, which includes education of the senses, body, mind, moral and religious education. Vivekananda's educational thought laid emphasis on realization of the perfection already in man. He placed greatest stress on education as the gradual unfolding of the intrinsic quality of the individual and was of the view that no knowledge comes from outside. According to Iqbal, the essential purpose of education is to develop man's individuality and felt that education should ensure the possibility of eternal progress. The educational philosophies of Indian thinkers have stressed that education must be comprehensive and should aim at the development of the total personality of the individual in harmony with society and nature.

Against this background, the present study focused on examining the effectiveness of a school, called Mirambika, based on the educational ideals of Sri Aurobindo. It aimed at studying the school in terms of its ideological and operative goals in relation to school organization, culture, and teaching-learning encounters

Objectives

The main objectives of the study were:

1. To make a comprehensive study of the school organisation in Mirambika in terms of its transcendental and operative goals*. It involved examining the roles and responsibilities entrusted to the key functionaries of the school (e g Principal, Managing Committee members, students) and their role perception.
2. To analyse the school culture in terms of norms and values on which it operates including the routine activities (like prayer, assembly, tests, P.T.) and special celebrations (like sports day, annual day, independence day etc)
3. To examine the teaching-learning encounters in school: the transcendental view and the operative procedures followed It involved the study of syllabi, learning activities, role of teachers and students choice in selection of subjects, etc to know how learning is organised in school to meet the various goals
4. To discern the psycho-social characteristics of students who after completion of their education in Mirambika have gone to other educational institutions. In particular, the study examined, :
 - (a) Individual achievement as compared to the average class achievement.
 - (b) Adjustment skills, coping styles, life satisfaction and cognitive style as perceived by the teachers, parents and students.

* According to Thapan (1991), transcendental goals (official) are governed by the underlying philosophy and provide guidelines on how the school ought to function. The operative goals are governed by the official goals and external factors like admission to higher educational institutions, board examinations, parental pressures and expectations. These constitute the actual schooling process.

Chapter 2

Mirambika : The School

Genesis

Mirambika came into being in 1981 (school prospectus) as a result of All India Teachers' meet held in October 1980, in which the need emerged to set up an Integral Teachers' Training College in Delhi along with a pilot school embodying and manifesting the ideal of free progress education as envisioned by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. The school started with fifty-seven children and ten teachers, now has 127 (52 boys and 55 girls) children and approximately 40 teachers (1995-96 session). The school aims to provide a stress free environment of learning to each child, paced to his needs and capacities based on the Sri Aurobindo's principles of teaching. Basic principles of learning as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo (1960) are : (i) "true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or task master, he is a helper and a guide", (ii) "the mind has to be consulted in its own growth", (iii) "to work from near to the far, from that which is, to that which shall be". The principles of free progress education, states Sri Aurobindo, "are so universal that they can be applied anywhere and everywhere, it is a base that respects the uniqueness of each human being".

The Site

Nestled among the trees in the premises of the Aurobindo Ashram in South Delhi is Mirambika. The approach to school is the 'Sunlit Path' which has Sri Aurobindo statue, signifying the road taking Sri Aurobindo's vision to the outside world. Wide open, green spaces lined with eucalyptus trees surround the school which has swings, slides, neem grooves - which at various junctures provide space for learning activities for different groups. The school's building speaks of the attempts made to integrate Sri Aurobindo and Mother's presence in its architecture. A part of the school is under construction but on completion the school building will resemble the Mother's symbol i.e. twelve petals around a centre. The petals indicate various virtues to be inculcated in a person and a group of four petals indicate the four major powers Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalaxmi and Mahasaraswati. Sri Aurobindo's presence is seen at the centre of the school which is shaped as his symbol ☆ and each sub-area in school also acquires this shape. The two triangles indicate the process of transformation with the upward pointing triangle as ascent into the divine and downward pointing triangle as manifestation of divine on this earth. The seven layers of water in the middle, indicates seven layers of consciousness, with the lotus indicating the flowering of divine aspiration in a person. Keeping in

time with this symbol, there is a pond in the centre of the school and attempts at growing lotus in it are being made

The inside of the school building too, has green plants and an artificially constructed pond with bamboo stalks, aquatic plants and fishes. The foyer has the main office and the store for stationery. On one side of the foyer is the office of the coordinator and some other spaces of common use like the living museum, library, art room, sports room, science laboratory, gymnasium and the dining hall. The computer room, talk room and classrooms for junior children are also on the ground floor. The first floor houses classrooms for older students, the meditation hall, music room, resource room and teacher training room. The classroom for younger children have an annexe where children do activities and are able to avoid distractions. A round sunken area in the room is also used for seating children and adjacent to the classroom is a sand pit. The children have a separate exit for the adjoining small park with swings, slides etc. Large cupboards in the room are used for storing toys, colour, paper and other things used by the children. The class rooms for older groups have tables and chairs arranged in a circular fashion and are used for group work. These are separated while doing individual work. Blackboard, individual cupboards, common cupboards and spaces for Sri Aurobindo and Mother's photograph comprise the classroom. The classroom for different groups are separated by low walls, giving an impression of large space with different groups working in different work areas. Large class windows is a notable feature of the school which creates an impression of unobstructed space at the same time gives the building benefit of natural light and breeze. The architectural and physical organisation of classrooms of older and junior groups children has a distinct structure which may be seen as the school's attempts at fostering an environment conducive to its ideology of free progress education

The Objectives: The main objectives of Mirambika (as stated in the school prospectus 1994-95) are to develop the mental faculties of children, their physical skills along with the psychic and vital qualities. They aim to achieve these by providing an environment to help each child make an attempt to seek perfection in all his actions, providing experience for learning through activities and to help the child discover his unique set (personal capacities)

Admission Criteria

Admission is given to the child on the basis of parental selection. The selection of parents/children is conducted in four stages :-

- 1 Initial registration
- 2 A short interview
3. Group discussion/filling up detailed questionnaire
- 4 Observation of children

The screening of potential parents begins at the initial registration phase. The parents are screened on the basis of their general suitability and specific issues like whether they would be able to manage the transportation for children depending on the area of residence. Parents are given the Mirambika prospectus and called for a short interview.

The short interview takes place with 3 to 5 parents called in a day with time intervals of 30 minutes approximately. Selection is done keeping in mind the parents values, attitude towards schooling and the parents who feel the need for something different than the traditional (formal) system of schooling. The focus is on issues like : (a) Do the parents have clarity about the reasons for applying to Mirambika? (b) Do the parents have the values which the panel wants in a "Mirambika parents" i.e. lack of materialistic, consumeristic orientation and a focus on the Indian "*Sanatan*" (spiritual/yogic values)? (c) Do the parents have time to devote to their children? (d) Ascertaining that older children do not go to different schools. (e) How is the relationship between the husband and the wife? For this, the interaction between the parents is observed during the interview.

The long interview consists of a group discussion and filling up of questionnaires. For the group discussion, the parents are divided into 2 to 3 groups/husband and wife in separate groups and are given a topic chosen by the members of the coordinating team, to discuss. The topic is of relevance to education and include themes like "How important is emotional education of the child and how can we foster this?" or "What changes would you like in future education of your child."

In addition to the long interview, the children are also observed in the school

The typical day structure in Mirambika

The children start their day with sports for 45 minutes together for all children and diyas. Thereafter they collectively clean their rooms, which is followed by a short session of meditation. In the mornings, children of all age groups do project work. During this time they work in groups on specific topics which are wide ranged but also linked to subjects being taught i.e. viewing films, drama, model making, experimenting, art, craft, music etc. The students are taught subjects like English, Hindi, Mathematics thrice a week in the afternoons, (formal) teaching of specific subjects takes place during this time. Twice a week in the afternoons children have 'club' activities in areas like cooking, management, jewellery making, calligraphy, art, craft..... pottery making. The child is free to choose and participate in an activity of his/her interest

Classes

There are no graded classrooms in school, children are grouped according to their age and each group has an overlap of ages, namely; Red group (3 years), Blue (4+ years), Green (5+ years), Yellow (6+ years),

Orange (7+ years), Progress (8+ years), Humility (9+ years) and Receptivity (10+ years). The number of children in each group range from 15 to 20. The number of boys and girls in the school is almost equal.

Teachers

The teachers in Mirambika are doing voluntary teaching and are not paid any salary. However, they are chosen on the basis of interest in working with children, affection and motivation to do their job. Some of them are full time *ashramites* (residing in the ashram), some are volunteers who come for teaching specific subjects or to take up some specific activity, others are those who are B.Ed. trainees and are doing B.Ed. from Indore University (summer course), while taking up practise teaching in Mirambika. The volunteers are paid only conveyance charges while the others are paid a token stipend which vary between full-time and trainee teachers. The number of teachers keep changing from time to time. However the student teacher ratio is approximately 3:1.

Mirambika has a Teacher Training Wing on its premises which conducts ongoing training for its teachers in-service as well as pre-service. The training programme focuses on the school ideology and philosophy, principles of learning which from the bases of teaching-learning in school.

Curriculum

Mirambika has a multi-level learning system, i.e. children within a group may perform at different levels in different subjects and teaching is done specific at their individual level. The school follows project approach to teaching and has no fixed curricula or syllabus. However for each group, goals in terms of qualities, faculties and skills to be developed during the course of one year are decided and delineated into quarterly targets. Within this broad framework the child is provided varied learning experiences by working on projects which are interdisciplinary in nature.

During the actual course of project work children do a lot of activities related to the project chosen by a particular group. Children collect information, have group discussions, quiz competition, putting up exhibitions and questioning on the topics. Sometimes experimentation and field trips are also arranged. The groups are monitored to provide for formal learning in informal settings. The child learning is paced according to his capabilities, e.g. a child may be performing a year lower to his age on one subject and at a higher level in another. In the afternoons the children are taught specific subject areas e.g. English, Hindi and Mathematics. Subject specialists teach in small groups or individually depending on the need of the child keeping in view the minimum learning required for a particular age group. Hence, the curriculum is not rigidly structured and remains open-ended.

Evaluations

No tests or exams are conducted at any stage or in any group in Mirambika. The teacher decides the goals to be achieved during a specific time. In normal course the teacher plans for the week. Activities in accordance with the objectives are also planned in advance. Evaluation is done to know how much the child has covered and what more is needed? The teacher makes the child's profile covering all areas of learning (mental, physical, vital and psychic) The progress is measured against the child's own record and not with others in the group (self-referenced). No marks or grades are given, it is feedback to parents of child's work by the teacher. Evaluation is descriptive, non-judgemental and discussed individually with each child's parent. In higher groups children undergo self-evaluations on completion of a topic or activity for which proformas and schedules are prepared by the teachers

After "Mirambika" what?

On completion of their schooling at 9-10 years of age in Mirambika it is assumed that the children have completed their education upto approximately class V of a traditional school. After this majority of the students go to Mother's International School (M.I.S.) and a few to Sardar Patel Vidyalaya and some to other schools in the capital. The school also plans to upgrade itself by adding one level every year and take it upto the level of class X.

Chapter 3

Field Work Experiences

The process of collecting data through observations in school can be broken into three stages - entry, data collection, and exit. The first portion of this section describes our selection of and entry to the research setting.

Entering the Research Site

Gaining complete access to all the participants in the school was accomplished in four stages. Entry began by approaching the Managing Committee Members, to the principal, the school coordinators, the teachers, the students and to the community (parents).

Initial contact with the school was made through the Director N.C.E.R.T. Prof. A.K. Sharma who was approached by Tara Jauhar, Manager of the school and Mrs. I Pillai the Principal, Mother's International School (M.I.S.) who showed interest in knowing the effect of innovative pattern of schooling on the total development of the children.

In the preliminary meetings with Mrs. Pillai, Principal, M.I.S., Tara didi and Partho*, the broad parameters of the study were discussed, both the institutions were interested in the collaboration. However, it was decided that for the study to begin with, the Mirambika principal be given a copy of the proposal for clarifications and to work out the details. A verbal agreement to carry out the proposed study was made and the operational details were left out which were to be done in consultation with the Mirambika Principal.

Entry I : The Principal

After having worked out the operational details a meeting was fixed up with the Principal. His major concern was that the study might interfere with the functioning of the school, especially the presence of the observer in the class. After convincing that every effort will be made not to interfere in the classroom activities or intervene in other school processes, he finally agreed though a bit hesitatingly. No formal contract was made but a written approval for the study was received from the principal with a special mention that no test will be administered to the children. Verbal instructions given to the team were : don't disturb the teachers or children while in class; and don't ask questions from children during or after the class (the only time given for this interaction was the lunch time). The principal also desired that the progress of the work may be periodically shared with him at the convenience of both sides. The

* Principal Mirambika.

day to day functioning of the research team in school were left for, after discussion with the team of school coordinators

Entry II : The School Co-ordinators

After a brief introduction by the principal with one of the school co-ordinators, "We were left alone to find our way and break ice with them". In the beginning none of our queries or questions were answered. Instead they suggested we get a feel of the school for a couple of days by sitting in the class, observing, watching participants during meditation, games etc. The co-ordinators held the opinion that one does not enter someone's house till one gets to know the occupants similarly, Mirambika too was their home. Detailing of the research teams' schedule was done only after we got acquainted with the physical structure of the school. No formal schedule was worked out except that the research team will be in field till the end of the academic year i.e. 1995-96. Informal talks with the co-ordinators helped in providing a framework to develop a working schedule. Full freedom was given in planning our schedule except cautioning us not to talk to the teachers or the children during observation in class. Till now contact with teachers was mainly restricted to seeing them in the premises.

Entry III : The Teachers

First formal contact with the teachers was made on 16th Sept. 1995 in one of their weekly Saturday meetings. The Principal introduced us to the faculty and we were asked to talk about the proposed research work, its objectives and in brief what the research team intended doing. No questions were asked, teachers already seemed to be aware of the project, since majority of the teachers are 'ashramites', (residents in the Ashram premises) they had wider opportunities of sharing, discussing the school issues. Our early interactions with the faculty for quite sometime were limited to exchanging greetings while taking notes in the class. Our presence probably held an 'evaluative stance' which with time was erased and our acceptance as a member of the school community was confirmed on many occasions. One possible reason for acceptance could be deliberate, conscious effort made by the research team to go through the process of "acculturation". This happened to reduce the physical distance which eventually led to being accepted as one of them. Most of the teachers took to our presence as non-threatening, while some others were conscious, with an exception of one or two who gave us a feeling of being "watched" - which made us all the more clear of our role in school i.e. of a researcher and not of an evaluator.

As proximity increased the advantages were manifold and so were the problems arising from the expectation of teachers and students regarding our involvement in their activities of the school. This problem was managed by consciously remaining on the periphery of any activity and maintaining a marginal position in the school. In general, clarity of our role followed by congruent behaviour provided to be important ingredients of acceptance and rapport building in the school.

In general, entry to the teachers was a bumpy ride in the initial stages. At times our presence was totally ignored as if "taken as a part of the furniture", snubbed on inquiring with the plea Mirambika is a learning place for all, so discover for yourself. A special mention also needs to be made of the acceptance of the research team after having spend about 1/3 of the study time in school. By then majority of the teachers had started inquiring about the research progress, matters of personal concern and also in case of our absence. Our presence was "taken for granted" in the school by then.

Entry IV : The Children

Initial contact with children was through observation of their daily activities. Though we were silent observers and did not initiate talk, informal talk did develop, however, when the children asked us if we were the new teachers in school. Depending on the situation we answered their queries and at times made attempts to explain our presence objectively. To the majority of the children the research team members were now teachers, as they did not appear to understand what we were doing.

Total acceptance by the children was the key factor in making intensive observations and at the same time maintaining marginality in the classroom processes, as they always were too pre-occupied to bother what we were doing. The positive relationship was maintained till the 'family profile' was sent to their parents. Slight tension and distrust prevailed for a short time as the children felt it was 'none of N.C.E.R.T.'s business to know about children', they eyed us suspiciously but eventually forgot the incident.

Gaining entry in the social life of the school participants was beneficial as it helped in establishing research as a legitimate activity in school. As the research developed the research team was viewed, especially by the children as a part of the school which gave rise to maintaining a credible research role.

Strategies in Data Collection

Since the school, Mirambika was a pre-selected case for the study, hence, the work may be called intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995) of the school's organisation, culture and the teaching - learning processes. The emphasis is on completeness of the analysis, by taking into account every possible pertinent aspect of the case, i.e. detailed examination of one setting (Good and Scates, 1954).

Ethnographic approach to study the school was undertaken which primarily is dependent on the researcher as an essential component of the research process. It requires the researcher to take an attitude of student attempting to study the particular group or culture. "Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people" (Spardlev, 1979, P 3). It involves observation, discussion and reflection.

It is neither subjective or objective, but is interpretive, mediating two worlds through a third.

DATA COLLECTION : THE MILE-STONES

The study employed the following data collection methods given in tabular form in Table 2.1. Each of the school aspects under study mentions the technique used

Table 2.1

Variables	Source	Measures
SCHOOL ORGANISATION	School Process a) Recruitment of teacher b) Student selection c) Evaluations d) Communication with community Perceptions of a) Teachers b) Parents	Open-ended interview, questionnaires, informal talk Participant observation, informal talk Observation Observation, examining school records Informal talk, interview, questionnaire, observation Interview, parent profile
SCHOOL CULTURE	School activities Routine Meditation Morning sports, Breakfast lunch, clubs and Evaluations Formal : Sports day, Maha Samadhi, Opening of Gym, Cultural days and Christmas Celebrations Perceptions of a) Teachers b) Students c) Parents	Participant observation, Classroom observation Informal talk, Interview Informal talk, questionnaire, interview, observation Observation, Sentence Completion, Life at Mirambika (free expression). Interview
TEACHING-LEARNING ENCOUNTERS	a) Syllabi b) Instructional resources c) Transation of curriculum d) Teaching strategies e) Interaction in class	Observation in class, examining the school records and work done by children.

Validation by Triangulation

Validity of the interpretation of the school phenomena are sought in triangulation, i.e. application and combination of several research methodologies in the study of the same phenomena (Denzin, 1985). The present case study relied on a number of research methods viz. participant observation, informal observation and talk, unobtrusive methods (documents, records, phenomenological material) questionnaires and interviews. The effectiveness of triangulation rests on the premise that the weaknesses in each single method will be compensated by the counter-balancing strengths of another. The present used different methods for collection of data and for cross-validating the findings. The main methods employed were observation, interview and questionnaire. Data collection began in September, 1995 and extended over to April 1996

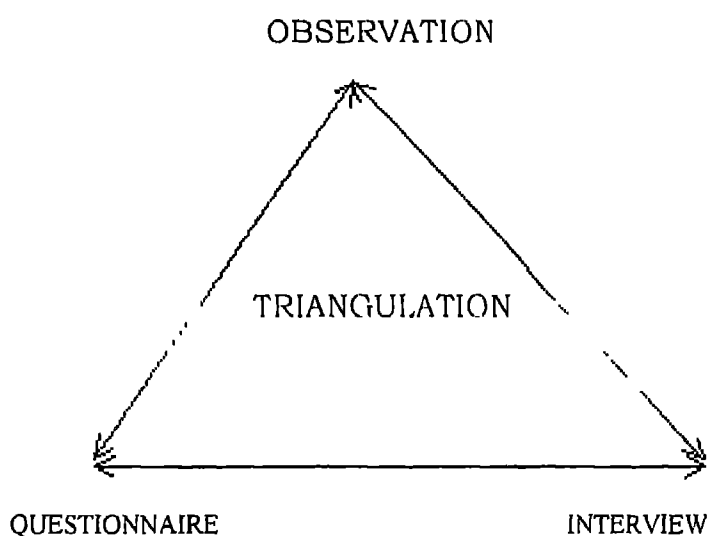


Fig 2 1

DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis of the qualitative data collected in the form of observations and interviews were mainly treated to an extent of “making sense” out of the data. The essence of dealing with data was not to impose meaning on the data but letting the data speak. Inductive data analysis was attempted for the present study. This involved the discovery of patterns, themes and categories as they emerge from the data. Analysis of data collected in the present study took place in the following stages.

Stage I : Keeping the research questions in mind the data was classified pertaining to school organization, culture and teaching-learning processes. The three sets of data were dealt with one at a time to develop tentative and preliminary ideas. Emerging themes and ideas provided a summary picture of the focus of the study.

Stage II : This involved making sense out of volumes of data and examining it from both the perspectives i.e. ideology and actual practice, resulting in recognizing the patterns across different activities in school.

Grouping the data according to the emerging themes along with numbering the pages of the diaries on which observations were made helped in “knowing” the data. This phase was an attempt at framing the data and narrowing the focus to the objectives of the study.

Stage III : This phase primarily dealt with the data in terms of “naming” the identified themes. It was kept in mind that the essence of the activity was not lost in the indigenous labels. The focus was to keep the meaningfulness of the data intact.

Stage IV : This phase dealt with comparing and contrasting the reflections on patterns and themes identified. This involved cross-validating (Triangulation, Denzin, 1978) among sources of data, observer and methods to “gauge and trust worthiness” of the interpretations.

Presentation of Findings

Data gathered is a narrative presentation of describing the context, the site, the participants involved during the entire data collection time-period. Names are retained for confidentiality. An analysis of the actions and events with respect to the ideological or operative goals is also weaved in the description. The findings are presentation of the school processes in the form of a narrative report of the “investigations” made.

Chapter 4

School Organisation

The ideology on which the school is based influences its school organisation be it physical or pedagogic, which in turn influences the classroom topography. This section examines the organisational structure of Mirambika in terms of its resources, the way children spend their school hours, decision making process and the disciplining strategies used in the school.

I. Resources in School and their Utilisation

Mirambika has a number of resources-physical and material which are characterized by the principles of 'openness' (Malehorn, 1978) i.e. of self-directed learning, enhancing uniqueness, encouraging exploration, flexibility in planning, sensitivity and affective awareness. Some of these are provided by the architectural lay out of the school, for instance, the wide roof terrace which is used for various activities during the cool months of the year. Similarly the "neem grove" and the open spaces surrounding the school are used for multiple purposes like group walks, games, exhibitions etc. The common spaces of use located in the school include the library, the science laboratory, meditation hall, the art room, stationery room, gymnasium, computer room, talk room and the living museum. The physical facilities may therefore be taken as resources in the school keeping in view their functions, activities organised, equipment and the material they provide for school processes.

A synoptic over-view of the different resources in Mirambika is presented along with their physical organisation, material resource and functional use. The factual description of resources combined with the information obtained through informal talks with the school coordinators and teachers is presented. Attempt is made to throw light on the nature of linkages established among school goals, activities and resources available. Though physical facilities may not solely determine the learning environment, yet their role in providing challenging and enriching learning environment in the school cannot be underestimated.

1. Library

The library is situated on the ground floor and constitutes a big room, well lit with electric lights and huge windows characteristic of all Mirambika rooms. There are wooden cupboards, notice boards for putting up charts, maps and articles; besides the wooden tables, chairs and stools. Photographs of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are placed on the shelves. The library is equipped with books ranging from encyclopaedias, adventure books, fairy tales, books on religion, philosophy, history, art, music, science etc. A large number of books are on Aurobindo and Mother. Children's magazines like Target, Misha, Lok Sanskritam, Mother India, Auroville Today, Swagat, National geographic world and many more are found in the library stacks. In addition, there

are documents on library information, teaching aids, historical charts, maps, globes etc. Books in English language dominate in number though Hindi, Oriya, Sanskrit, Bengali and other foreign language books are also stocked. The library on working days functions during the school hours and is also open on Saturdays especially for teachers, this being their day of planning for the week.

The library apart from being a place of reading, consultation and reference caters to the students and teachers as a resource centre too. As the group work shifts from the classroom to the library it then becomes a place of group activity. Children's movement is not restricted to a specific day or time, they are free to consult whenever they feel like. The library in Mirambika is not a "hushed" sanctuary for children but a place where they can interact with each other within limits for which the responsibility is given to the child.

2. Art Room

The other resource in Mirambika is the **art room**. According to the art coordinator it is conceptualized as a 'space to get in touch with oneself' and a place used by the children and teachers to develop their sensitivity through the medium of art. Keeping in view the nature of work the physical organisation of the room is a well-lit, ventilated, elongated room with high tables, low tables, simple floor mats, large closet cupboards for storage of art material. Shelves for display of items, models or other art work are placed in such a way that they are visible from outside the art room.

The art room has a wide variety of materials including water colours, powder colours, brushes, canvasses, poster colours, fabric paints, waste materials (egg cartons, bottle caps, boxes etc.), clay (pill mitti, geru mitti), maida, beads, threads, plaster of paris, glues (fevicol, quickfix), dyes, bleaching powder, special face paints etc

The financial allocation for purchase of material varies from Rs 4,000-Rs. 10,000 per annum; however, certain things are obtained from the store (Matri Stores) in the Ashram

Since the art room has been conceptualized as a space for exploration the various purposes it serves are as under:-

- i) *Art coordinator taking activities with the children* : The coordinator decides on a project on 'art', plans it and executes it. For instance in the previous years the students visited Mandawa in Rajasthan, observed various art forms and reproduced them as designs made in mud, mehendi, stick painting etc
- ii) *Topic related activities* : The project undertaken by the teachers at times involves integration of various kinds of art activities. The art coordinator provides the material and helps in execution of those activities

iii) *Training centre for teachers* . The art coordinator holds orientation workshops for teachers in school. Teachers are made aware of the available material, and oriented to their use and related activities which may be carried out with the children. Art room in Mirambika serves as a learning centre for teachers as well as for students. Various art activities are held by professionals visiting the school and by the school itself. These resource persons demonstrate activities like Chinese painting, Madhubani painting, tie and dye, paper cutting and many more children along with the teachers are seen actively participating in these various activities.

iv) *Club activities* : Weekly activities known by the name 'clubs' are held by older children for their peers and younger children in the area of craft, mehendi, chalk making, feather painting etc. While others are taught how to master a particular art Children are provided freedom to search/arrange for their own material, occasionally depending on the art coordinator for certain materials

The process of art education in school relates to doing activities for skill development and activities for inner expression. The former refers to guided activities whereas in the latter children are free to explore and create. The art coordinator believes that "art is science in reality" e.g. a painting with depth perspective could teach concepts like linearity, shadows, roughness-smoothness etc intuitively which at a conscious level becomes science. In line with this the school plans to take up anthropometry (subject that combines art and science) in its new building and extend the scope of the present art room to pottery, sculpture and much more.

3. Science Lab

The science laboratory in Mirambika is a specially designed room with designated spaces for chemistry, physics, biology and home science. It is divided by a row of cupboards into two main areas, chemistry and physics and biology and home science. The room is so organised that 2 or 3 groups of children can work at the same time. Cupboards are used for storing equipment and have labels of perishable and non-perishable items, stuck on them. According to school sources almost all materials in chemistry, physics and biology required for primary level are available in the science laboratory

The organisation of activities in the laboratory are decided in consultation with a science team constituted for the purpose of planning, organising and guiding of various kinds of science activities throughout the year These relate to .

- i) Planning and executing of projects in science.
- ii) Integrating science activities with the projects undertaken in the group.

iii) Science workshops are held for the teachers as well as for the teacher-trainees. Principles of science teaching are explored and individual experiments are carried out by the teacher trainees. These are then replicated by the children

The science laboratory is maintained by the science team, which also plans its budget. The school has provision of borrowing materials like chemicals etc. from Mother's International School, on non-payment basis. The budget for 1995-96 session was Rs. 7,000; however there is provision for extra budget in case the expenditure excess the allotted budget.

The major purpose of teaching science as it emerged from talks with the coordinator is to develop observing, measuring reasoning, hypothesizing, inferring and predicting skills in children. Inculcating scientific attitude in children is one of the major goals of science laboratory. Thus, children are encouraged to be inquisitive, patient, optimistic and avoid procrastination for which relevant activities are organised for children

4. Music Room :

The next is the music room, which is an average sized room with 'durries' (floor mats) and has a guitar, piano, harmonium, tabla, flutes, dafli, damaroo, manjira, bells etc. The Piano is the one on which the Mother played and thus occupies a significant place in the music room. The harmonium is a personal piece donated by the founder principal of Mirambika. Similarly some other items have been donated by the Ashram or by parents. However, depending upon the needs of the children the music incharge buys the needed instrument in consultation with the principal.

The children in school are encouraged to make their own instruments. Natural raw or waste material like leaves, pipes, papers, stones etc are used for making these instruments. This results in making low-cost instruments and helping them to develop their creativity and imagination. These instruments are then used for dances, songs etc

The inputs provided by the school in this area varies depending on the resource persons available during a particular academic session.

5. Gymnasium and sports Rooms

Games and sports as a resource finds expression in the school gymnasium and sports room which is a small room having a variety of sports' equipment. The gym is a new addition in the school (1996) and is used by the children for playing table-tennis, badminton or doing gymnastics. The sports materials are kept in the small sports room, the children themselves issue material in a register kept for the purpose. The sports room is operated by the children on their own in the mornings, during lunch time and occasionally during other timings too. Keys are kept at a specified place and children hold responsibility for operating, issuing, returning or breakage of any material. Some unique

sports items like walking sticks, single pedalos, double pedalos, strength bar, bat ball, huge ball besides indoor games equipment, cricket, trampoline etc. find place in the sports room. Majority of these are primarily donated by a German coach from Pondicherry.

The school authorities expressed that proper maintenance of the equipment is lacking primarily because of small storage place. Children from different groups are assigned a day during the week for checking use and misuse of all the equipments.

6. Resource Room - Centre for Teaching-Learning Aids : The school also has provision of making teaching aids for the children either by the B Ed trainees or by the teachers, children themselves or by those parents who are interested and voluntarily opt for the same. A large room where these teaching-learning aids are designed, prepared, stored and used is called the **resource room** in school. Situated on the first floor, facing the inner side, in the corner is a longish room with cemented slabs, mats for sitting and low tables for working on. The resource room is the one which has been in school right from the beginning and is established with the aim of generating resources and to develop a resource bank for providing different kinds of teaching materials. Children's use of these materials helps to make learning interesting and experiential according to the resource room coordinator. It also serves as a resource centre for organising workshops for parents and teachers. Networking with other organisations for materials and information on developing these forms a part of its functions. Models, charts, toys, educational games, posters, flash cards, information files, maps, activity cards, slides, projector, audio-video cassettes are some of the materials displayed. Efforts were being made to index or catalogue all the materials available in the centre.

It is evident that there are various "rooms" serving as resources in the school which act as centres of learning for students and teachers. Organisation of activities in the school is dependent on available facilities and materials and the freedom given to the participants to use them. In Mirambika, work in class is closely linked to these 'resource centres' and integration across the various areas of work aids in linking theory with practical know how. The organisation of activities in these resource centres is geared towards making the learner take initiative, be independent, responsible, reflective, confident and active.

Besides these the other places which are activity centres of significance are the meditation room, computer room, living museum and the dining hall.

7. Meditation and Other Rooms

(a) *The meditation room* is a fully carpeted room used occasionally for the purpose, since everyday meditation takes place in the respective classes/groups. During certain special days like Maha Samadhi day the children assemble for meditation. Talk room is a room used for the

purpose of having one to one interaction either with the child, parent or teacher. It is a small room with a table and some chairs.

(b) *Computer room* serves as a resource by having everything documented. The coordinator maintains information on all projects done in the school i.e. groupwise and by the individual child. Separate information of each child in school i.e. his background, activities done in school (projects) form a part of the information. Projectwise information relates to details like students and teachers involved, year when undertaken, goals of the project, materials used, activities undertaken and resources used. Apart from this a complete teacher's profile is documented which includes year of joining, leaving, qualification, experience etc

(c) *The living museum* unlike its name is a huge hall with floor mats and durries and bare walls. It is a multi-purpose room often used for meditation, project work, parent meetings, teacher meetings or for holding exhibitions.

(d) *The Dining hall* in school is shaped in the form of star (☆) resembling like Sri Aurobindo's symbol. It has tables and chairs, low levelled tables and durries, some cemented tables and chairs for children and teachers. The plates are stacked in wooden shelves and each child and teacher has been allotted a number. Sinks have taps fixed at low level for younger children. The centre of the dinning hall is an open area with no roof whereas the sides are covered giving the area a look of openness. Food is served by children, in weekly turns, everyone, including teachers and principal line up for their food and later clean their respective plates.

The significance of the physical resources in Mirambika lie in the space and freedom provided to use these under the guidance of the teachers, more so to be able to use it on their own without constraints of imposed rules and regulations. This kind of environment stimulates the child to seek new experiences, new understandings and caters for optimum learning. Also, it is the school curriculum i.e. the goals of education, which provide challenge as well as the guidelines for use of materials and other resources. These centres are indeed the evidences that learning in Mirambika is interactive, integrated in a closely knit participatory fabric of experiences that he not only inside the classroom but also outside the classroom.

II Typical Day in Mirambika

It is Monday morning 8 30 a.m. The children dressed in varied colours on Sunlit Path approach the school building, some enter, others start informal games in the grounds. No bell clangs, children are seen moving towards the dining hall for collective breakfast, exchanging weekend news, a bite of sandwich and fruit, and disappearing quietly in their classrooms. Children and Diyas (teachers) clean their work places,

dusting, sweeping, mopping getting ready for the day. Music (for meditation) marks the start of the school day, stilling silence prevails, students and teachers sitting, some stand, eyes closed, a few looking out of the large windows but deep in thought, perhaps, attempting to gather their thoughts and looking forward to the day's work.

These observations throw light on the smooth transaction the children undergo from their home to the school. The work culture of the school is evident in joint cleaning efforts regardless of their position as a teacher or student. The mornings are devoted to group work where pedagogic transactions take place through "project" approach to teaching. Each group takes up projects jointly in which different subject areas are integrated while achieving project goals. Collective lunch for students and teachers at 12.00 noon is an informal affair where children sit on durries spread on floor, each group has serving duties by turns, followed by each cleaning their own 'thalis' (big metallic plates) and placing them in specified cupboard/stacks. This is followed by 'formal training' from 1.00 to 3.00 p.m. for older groups i.e. class II (yellow) onwards. Mathematics and languages (English and Hindi) are taught by subject specialists majority of whom are volunteers. The closure of day's work is marked by meditation music at 3.00 p.m. followed by light snacks and milk or juice after which the children depart for their homes.

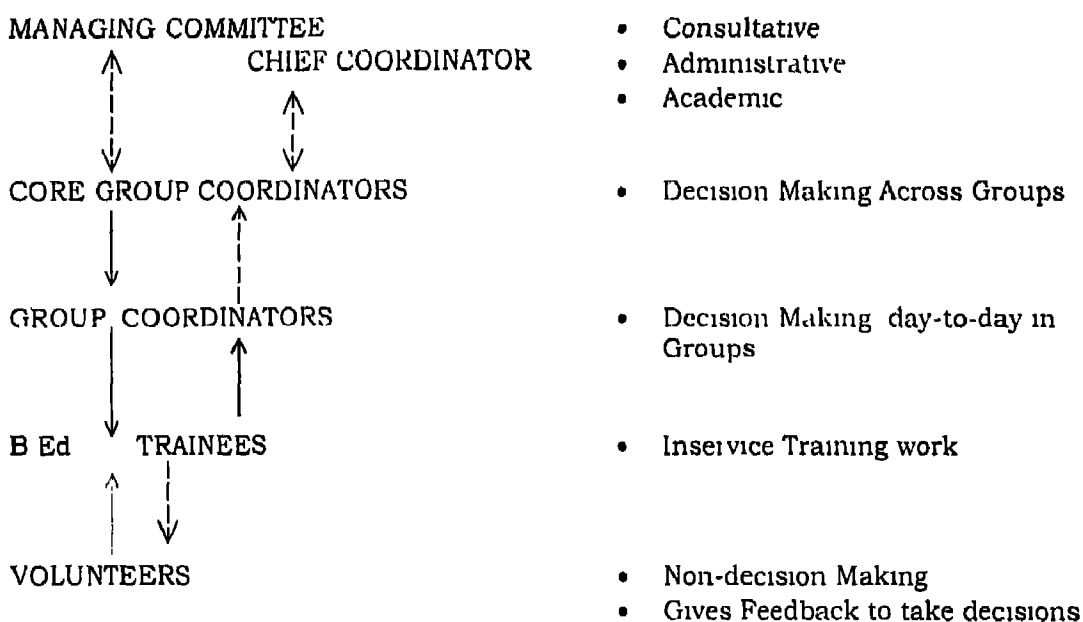
It is evident that the organisational and architectural space of the school i.e. its building, surroundings, equipment, materials, services, and other resources set certain restrictions and offers certain degree of freedom to its inhabitants. The importance of physical organisation of the school is highlighted in the context of cultural meaning it acquires. The furniture, the books, the grass, the trees all take of culturally defined meanings, which determine their limits and uses. All these set a range of freedom, mobility, independence, flexibility, responsibility and opportunity. The child's experiences in school are thus moulded by his surroundings which may have a personal meaning, a special meaning for him.

III. DECISION MAKING IN SCHOOL

It may be said that the ideology of the school provides a framework for structuring and organisation of its activities. This also takes into account the resources financial and manpower and together they impinge upon the nature of decisions taken. Centralized structure necessitates hierarchy, whereas decentralised organisational structure permits equal status and power to its workers. Organisational structure of the school thus provides the context which influences the decisions taken. Fig. 4.1 shows the members of the decision taking body and their respective role in Mirambika.

DECISION TAKING BODY IN THE SCHOOL

ITS ROLE



Formal ———
Lines of Communication

Informal - - - - -

Fig 4 1

The principal is looked upon as the chief-coordinator of the school and is a member of the core-group of school coordinators. They are the key functionaries in school and play a pivotal role in organization of the various school activities. Principals' role from other members of the core-groups is differentiated in terms of decisions on administrative matters which are taken solely by him, though he keeps contact with some of the Managing Committee members. Decisions are not taken single handed but after discussion and consultation the core group jointly decides the major issues in the school. The interviews with teachers also revealed a similar pattern. It is interesting to note that teachers' replies on, 'who takes decisions in school', resulted in majority of them stating 'we all sit and talk and decide what is to be done'. A few volunteers however, felt that the principal was the sole decision maker. Traces of this view point were observed in certain school related matters in selection of parents and volunteers in the school and decisions regarding upgradation of the school. The last issue i.e. upgradation was solely handled by the Principal in consultations with the Managing Committee members, according to an official source. The other coordinators claimed to know not much about this matter.

The managing committee comprises of sixteen members (Fig. 4.2). The Chairman, Manager and Education Consultant all the three are from the Aurobindo Society. There are four representatives from the Delhi Administration and three Principals, of Mother's International, Mirambika and Gyan Bharati Schools. The other six are : one teacher representative and one representative of teacher training wing (Mirambika), two members from the Aurobindo Ashram and two representatives of the parents.

In terms of its function, the managing committee purely functions as a consultative body no directives are given nor does it have a fixed meeting time in a year. What clearly emerged from our talks with school members is that decisions are usually taken jointly after discussion and consultation with its various members

Organisational Dynamics

Day-to-day functioning of the school reveals that the working relationship between the members are located in an informal work organisation. The functionaries view their roles as directions from "the divine" and their commitment to the ideology enhances identification with the school goals. Hence, they carry out their responsibilities in a collective collaborative manner. They achieve a sense of achievement and derive satisfaction from the roles they perform and evidence to this was seen in school, since there are no peons to do office work and is normally shared among the members, no extra hands to help the children with their personal needs, the group teachers tend to their needs; no office bearers to look after the principal's paper work; he himself works on the computer, along with some others, the list is endless. Hierarchy in work is not evident, the school comprises of equal status workers who set their own work pace to meet the school goals.

The boundaries of roles and responsibilities of the functionaries as perceived by the school are not rigid, but are flexible. This is because the school is constantly adapting to changes and demands in the environment as a result of feedback. Teachers are constantly reflecting on the need to adapt their work/tasks they undertake, to the different situations, including the day to day changes in the physical organisation of their respective class groups.

The principal is not regarded as supreme authority on day-to-day school related matters. Teachers and children are seen quite often seeking his guidance and support and he makes himself available to the children whenever required. His office is a small space with little furniture, often used by younger children as a place to 'hide' while playing. This is indicative of personal influence of an individual irrespective of the role performed by him in the school. Principals' influence on school members i.e. teachers and students may be attributed to his knowledge, personal skill, charisma, power of persuasion etc. Evidence to this effect was the students' perception of the

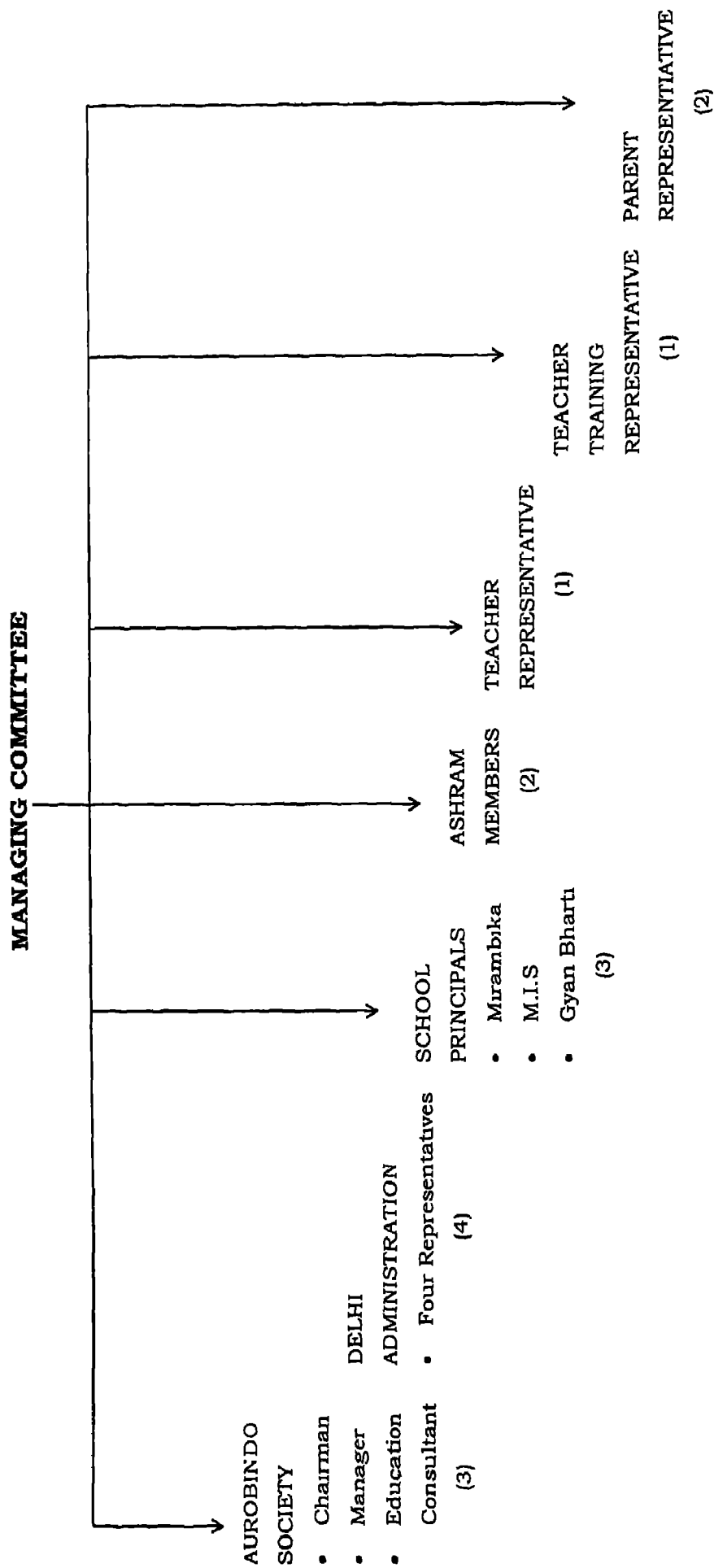


Fig. 4.2

principal as of a 'pal', he is great, knows everything, is a friend, etc. and not as some 'supreme authority' deserving deference.

IV DISCIPLINE : STRATEGIES AT WORK

It is apparent that Mirambika is sustained by a flexible organizational structure. Alternatives to authority in school, were attempts made to make teachers and students responsible for their actions by letting the responsibility of action lie with the individual member. The school organisation also seeks alternatives in school structure, work organisation, measuring success, classroom processes to attain the ideological goals of the school and are to be seen as the context in which Mirambika functions without authority.

The school does not relate teacher success to securing quiet and orderliness in their classroom, but is related to personal (self) and situational control. This is in line with our observations which state; 'Neither corporal punishment nor verbal aggression by teachers perform any role in school interactions'. Alternatives to punishments are worked-out by the group 'diyas'. Some controlling strategies have been evolved for the younger groups. These include.

- i) calling peace - symbolic gesture of hands to quieten the children
- ii) asking children to become 'Statue',
- iii) symbolic gestures like, "take the rat of fight and throw it out"
- iv) putting on music to make children dance and spend their extra energy,
- v) playing tug-of-war with the trees in the grounds, and
- vi) talking softly to get the attention of children who in turn lower their noise volume

In older groups strategies like the following are made use of.- Each child is given five sticks each, everytime the child speaks unnecessarily, one stick is taken away. Once the child has exhausted all the sticks - they would not be allowed to participate and ask questions. The focus of the school is on "inner discipline" i.e. control of emotions and actions. This may be viewed as schools efforts at providing education of the 'vital'. Activities like children taking up responsibility in serving food, looking after the sports equipment, providing medical aid for minor injuries, issuing books on their own and solving the in-fights taking place in their respective groups-also speak of efforts to inculcate sense of responsibility, cooperation and self-discipline. The children are encouraged to form their own rules, and are then asked to adhere to them. Assigning responsibility on the children seems to be a popular disciplining strategy used in school, this also helps to make children become aware of their actions. This is derived from the schools philosophy which restrains teachers from encouraging conformity to a set of rules

Chapter 5

Teaching Learning Encounters: Project Approach to Teaching

The pedagogic processes in Mirambika gain importance because of their nature, structure and organisation. Organisation of pedagogic activities takes place in broad scheduled time slots i.e. morning for projects and afternoon for "training". 'Project Work', an approach to teaching-learning, is multidisciplinary, theme oriented and attempts at integrating "arts" in its content. The children, normally while undertaking a project, work on themes and are given a choice of working in the area of their choice i.e., subject areas like sciences, social sciences, mathematics and language.

Though projects form the "essence of teaching-learning in Mirambika, it is the "training" or subject-specific teaching-learning which aims at fulfilling the "operative goals" of the school. No specific books are prescribed by the school, however project specific books and dictionaries are kept in the individual and common cupboards in the class and are used by children whenever required. NCERT text books for Hindi and Mathematics were seen frequently being used in the two highest groups. Library is consulted quite frequently, which has a good stock of Indian as well as foreign books. No formal tests are held; however, throughout the academic year children undergo evaluations in the form of self-evaluations, presentations, displays, quizzes etc. Children are promoted to the next group at the end of the academic year for which no formal year end evaluation takes place.

In this section broad overview of teaching-learning activities in Mirambika has been attempted. In particular this section examines the project approach adopted by the school, training as the conventional approach to teaching-learning and classroom topography.

Also, an attempt has been made to examine the achievement of children vis-à-vis minimum levels of learning. The school aims at all-round development of personality i.e. the psychic, vital, mental, physical and the spiritual. These learning goals of the school influence the curriculum, related activities as well as learning objectives of the participants. A details description of the project - Environment is presented to highlight the nature of subject matter taught, effect of physical environment, teacher commitment, values inculcated and the messages transmitted implicitly as well as explicitly.

I "THE PROJECT - ENVIRONMENT"

The Environment Project took place in the month of November-December 1995, this was primarily carried out on the decision taken by the chief-co-ordinator (Principal). The whole school was involved in this as it was felt that such a topic was the need of the hour and children need to get acquainted with issues related to environment.

PROJECT ENVIRONMENT : ITS STRUCTURE AND SALIENT FEATURES
Project Environment : The Structure

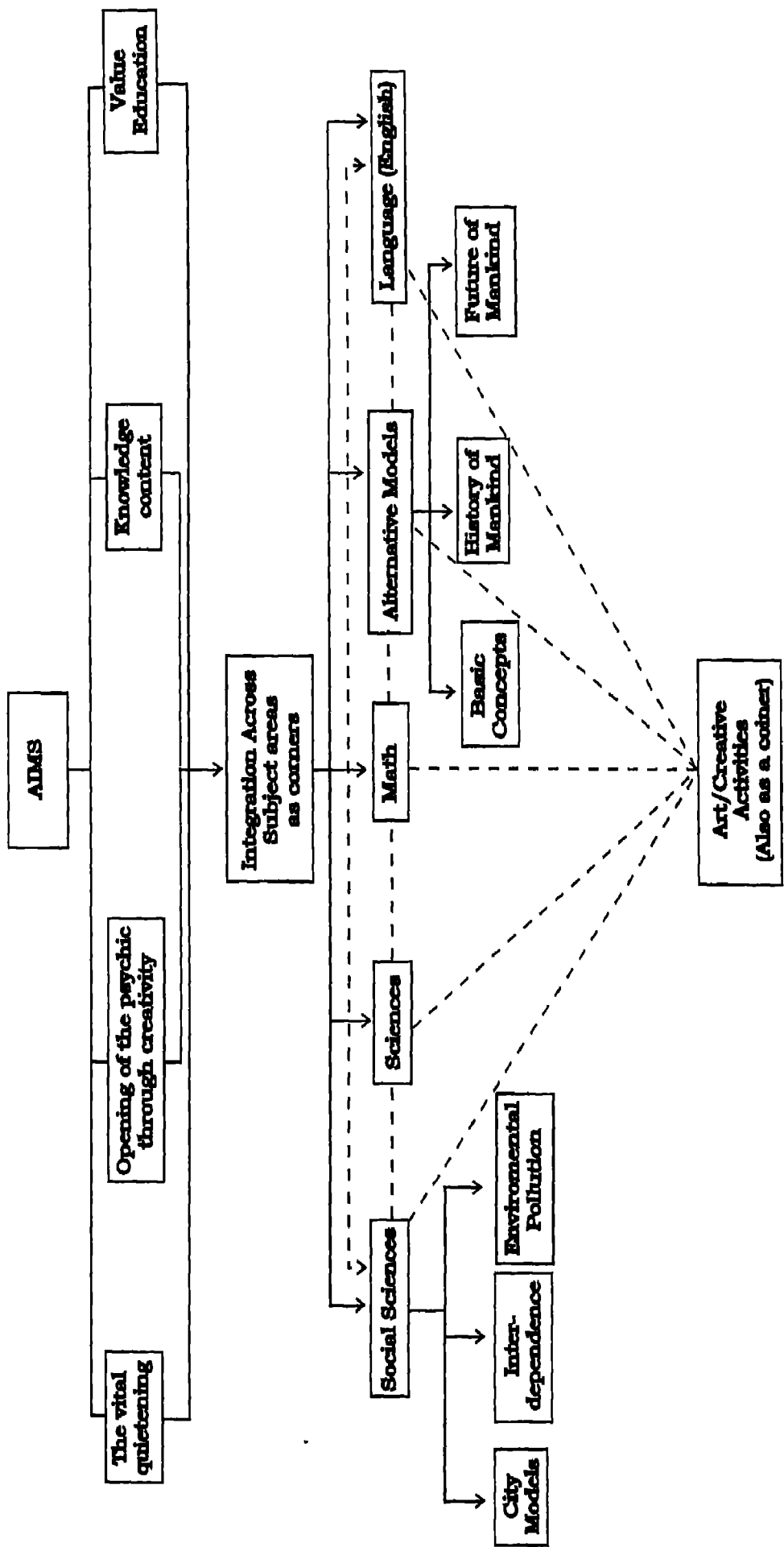


Fig 5 1

The first stage is **planning** which includes writing the aims, resources, activities and evaluation on preprinted "Planning sheets". Aims reflect the main ideas behind the project; the goals which the teachers and students want to achieve. The broad goals of the project were : quieting the 'vital' and opening of the 'Psychic'(Thinking inwards, reflecting). The goals varied keeping in view learning needs of that particular group.

Decision regarding setting up different corners related to different subject areas was jointly taken by the children and teachers. Children had to spend one week in each subject corner to choose an area of their interest. The movement of children across groups was also worked in detail. The planning looked like a fine intricate web of inter-linkages. Fig 5.1 shows the arrangement of different corners and their inter-linkages. The corners conceived included areas like social sciences, sciences, languages, mathematics and alternate models. Some corners had further sub-divisions, while art was incorporated in all activities, and was also conceptualised as a separate corner.

The first week of the project was the transition period where the children did activities related to their inner and immediate environment. The children after experimenting in different corners made final choice with regard to working in an area of interest. This is indicative of school's aim to make the child interested in his learning.

Learning as stated in the school goals is multi-level. Its evidence was found in the different subject corners designed to cater to children of different groups, i.e. in terms of ability, age, knowledge and content transacted. For this the school was divided into four levels i.e. level I consisting of Red, Blue and Green Groups (3-4-5 years of age), Level II Yellow and Orange Group (6-7 years), Level III Progress (8 years), and Level IV Humility and Receptivity (9-10 years of age)

Level I group designed their own activities which consisted of constructing a hill, planting and watering their plants, ordering their cupboards, racks etc. Level II, III and IV were further sub-divided into three smaller groups. The physical organisation of the corners was done keeping in mind optimum mobility; however, a formal organisational structure was evident (though it varied from corner to corner) in some corners where children were instructed to do activities in an orderly manner. The culminating activity of the project took the form of 'fairs' organised by younger groups, and exhibitions, quizzes and science experiments carried out by the older children for the younger children.

Some of activities carried out in the different corners were:

- 1) *Social Science* : This was sub-divided into three units. Environmental pollution-air, water, noise pollution. Experiments were done on noise, air/water, thought/mind pollution, interdependence of plant and animal Life integrated science experiments, on photo synthesis, foodwebs, food chains.

2) *Science* To a large extent activities overlapped with social sciences. Concepts and consequences of pollution were discussed in social science and experiments in science. Younger children did experiments like burning of paper, clothes, wood etc. Noise sound water pollution experiments were also carried out.

3) *Mathematics* : Attempt was made to integrate mathematics with science corner. Concepts were related to real life activities e.g. finding length of leaves, circumstances of trees, to take out 'mean' and plot bar diagram.

4) *Alternate Models* This corner dealt with the question of environment in a more wider-linear - historical perspective. Talks and discussions were held on the basic concepts to understand global implications of pollution. The aspects covered were i) Ozone layer, humidity etc. ii) traced man relation/dependency to his environment in the past. iii) Contemporary corner/issues like narmada valley project. iv)

Guided the children to envisage what future they desire for themselves. Issues like 'what is real development' were discussed. They designed on paper vehicles for future (sun or solar energy).

5) *Language* Focussed on creative writing on issues like . "My Aspiration"/"How I use my eyes" etc.

6) *Art and Craft Corner* . Resource persons from Bal Bhawan were invited and children painting of used flowers, stick painting, paper cutting (trees), book makers, etc.

The project environment throws light on the intentions of the approach. These may be summarised as . catering to individual abilities, increasing the relevance of curriculum, develop ability to participate in groups, to encourage curiosity, originality and creative expression and to teach use of reference materials and research skills. This may be seen in line with Aurobindo's philosophy of which stresses on inter-disciplinary nature of learning and in accordance to child's interest.

The school makes provision for such learning by computer compilation - of themes undertaken in previous years specific activities and resources used for ready reference of the teachers. Detailed syllabus planning is not done in school but within the framework of the goals each group coordinator works out the objectives, activities and evaluation within the broad framework of project work. For example, planning in school relate to goals (annual, trimester, project and day), specific skills (communication, listening, concentration) and developing mental faculties (judgement, observation, memory, reasoning).

Some aspects of the teaching methods need special mention as they impinge on project teaching. Rules of work are planned out in consultation with the children and work as foundations for discipline. Preparation of work-sheets, information sheets, recording sheets and evaluation sheets is done in advance by the teachers. Teachers work together to create a 'peaceful conducive environment of work and make provisions for individual attention to children having difficulties.'

Organisation of work takes place in small groups which are formed in accordance to their learning needs and also keeping in view the group dynamics. Children are given full responsibility and freedom in planning activities, making observations, personally experiencing and using resources in the school. Creative use of space is a common feature with children and are free to work in the grounds, lobby, library, lab etc.

These observations indicate the need of teachers to deal with open-endedness, spontaneity, organisational flexibility, to be generalists not specialists and a teaching style which can be stated as 'informal'. To pinpoint a teaching style would probably be difficult but the ethos of project is enquiry based learning and therefore, a range of teacher behaviours were witnessed.

II. "TRAINING" – FORMAL TEACHING

Training in Mirambika is synonymous to teaching in a conventional set-up. Formal teaching in subject areas like English, Hindi and Mathematics is provided thrice a week by subject specialists. The demarcating line between project and training is the number of teachers, time allotted, type of teacher (volunteer vs. school co-ordinators,) commitment to ideology, nature of work, and effective meaning they hold for the participants.

Training starts with the top four groups, i.e. (7 + years onwards) yellow, progress, humility and receptivity, and takes place on Monday, Tuesday and Thursdays in the afternoon. The volunteers are mainly subject specialists and are a heterogeneous group i.e. retired people, professionals in job, foreign GAP students, parents or people interested in teaching. Volunteers involvement varies from teaching specifically a particular subject to being involved in the project work. Books corresponding to the age level in the group are brought by teachers and children are free to consult any. Hindi is mostly done with NCERT books.

The subjective meanings attached to training by the children makes it a mundane, dull activity and, if given a choice, they would rather not have it. The response of children from the four senior most classes in school indicates that about 46% of them expressed the activity to be dull, boring, do not enjoy, or O.K. Expression of appreciation varied from good, O.K., nice etc.. The nature of training work varies in terms of it being an individualistic activity with some written work and sometimes home-work, single teacher, and relatively less participatory than project work. Combination of all these factors makes training not a very popular activity.

In spite of the two distinct types of teaching-learning approaches practised in school, a common thread between the two was witnessed during classroom transactions: Certain distinguishing characteristics of teaching - learning transaction are as under:

- Planning of activities and worksheets specially for each topic in advance

- Establishing ground rules for use of science sports, library, music, equipment Involving children in making rules to apply themselves helps in fostering responsible behaviour
- Integrating role-play, consolidation of information through quizzes, dramas, and play way activities in work.
- Questioning as a strategy to elicit information, recapitulation of previously done activities as well as for assimilation.
- Designing activities to encourage independent observation and reasoning
- Delegating responsibility
- Complete freedom for self-expression
- Peer-tutoring-sharing as base for learning
- Learning directly from experience i.e activity oriented teaching learning.
- Evaluating for feed-back on work done and mostly self-evaluation

III. THE CONTEXT OF TEACHING

Classrooms in Mirambika have a distinct physical structure and their organization has something unique which fosters "openness" in learning, which forms the classroom climate Apart from the process of teaching and learning the major processes going on in class is the interactions, the spoken messages as well as the silent language which also determine the atmosphere of the classroom

The Classroom Topography

In spite of certain distinctive characteristics of the younger and older group classrooms a common thread which runs through them is the symbolic presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in each group space. Fresh flowers are placed in front of them which are replaced by the children everyday in all the groups.

The work spaces for children in school are designed keeping in mind the needs of different groups. The three younger groups have large areas of work, low tables and durries used for sitting Each room for the young children has an annexe which is used for sleeping or for those children requiring special attention A sunken round area in one corner of the room is used for varied activities like singing, story telling, playing, etc

The physical organisation of the classroom bestows a structure on activities carried out for instance, the sunken area in the younger groups helps to provide physical restraint without the teacher engaging in acts of making young children confine to their place. Physical proximity of the inhabitants is enhanced thus fostering closeness, sense of security and close supervised attention. Children were often seen sitting on 'dīyas' laps or climbing on their backs. Large glass windows in the school create an impression of unobstructed space and also provide benefit of natural

light and breeze. Classes for older children have tables and chairs which are arranged in a circular manner. Separate space for individual work is also provided in each class. Common cupboards (for keeping stationery, dictionary, books etc), individual small cupboards for children (since they don't carry books from home) blackboard, display board are some of the features of Mirambika classrooms. "Areas of work" or work spaces would best describe the classrooms since they are separated by low walls, sometimes partitioned by cupboards. The openness and flexibility in the structural organisation impinges on the physical organization of the class. Along with these the school ideology provides the teacher, the freedom of organising and presenting material. The following description will provide a view of how the teachers and students function within such arrangements :

Location : Neem Grove*

Receptivity group (10 years) children and 'diyas' are carrying low levelled tables and small mats to open grounds and arrange in a semi-circle in two small groups. Each group has 4-5 children and one 'diya'. Movable display boards mark the boundaries of work areas, on which charts and write ups are displayed. The two groups are working on the project "Egypt". One group members are seen drawing the map and the other working on making a pyramid.

Location : Sunken Area (in the younger group)

Blue Group (4+ years) children are all piled up in the round sunken area along with one of the diyas. They are listening to a story with the diya dramatising, enacting some instances while some children are sitting on her lap, climbing on her shoulders, and she seems equally comfortable with them. A solitary young child artist is seen sitting in a corner, colouring intently least distracted by class activity. The second 'diya' is cleaning the cupboard and joins in the groups laughter at times.

As evident that physical space in Mirambika has its own distinctive character which gains importance in light of what it provides, i.e. opportunities and experiences. The students' views regarding their school found expression in the sentence blank given to them. The personal meaning the school environment had for them was expressed in words like 'wonderful', peaceful, calm and quiet, different, superb, beautiful Some children have given reasons for their liking and related it to trees, surrounding, building (stating it to be the best in the world) open fields, cool place, etc. In the children's own words :

"I like the building of Mirambika, because it is very open and there are so many places to hide, when you play hide and seek"

(Humility, 9 years)

"I like the building of Mirambika but not in winters because the chilly air and fog come in the group"

(Humility, 9 years)

"I like to be in Mirambika and the building. I like the playground and the trees, flowers, grass, plants, leaves, fresh air ... duck and fish pond".
(Progress, 8 years)

"The building is really superb than the ones in California".
(Receptivity, 10 years)

Though both the activities exist for pedagogic purpose and take place in classroom like settings yet the major difference lies with respect to the process of gaining facts. Each of these situations has a distinct character in terms of the approach followed, strategies used, set of rules and procedures adopted to achieve their goals. The three major activities implied in project work are interdisciplinary, collaborative, and participatory. Whereas training is subject-specific and individualistic, there is teachers' dominance over transaction. Analysis of responses of 52 student's to project and training work showed that project work was preferred to training and the number of students showing dislike for trainings was three times more than for projects. Some of the reactions of the children in their own words are as under :-

1. *'I don't like training too much because they are not very interesting.'*
2. *'I like Wednesdays and Fridays because we have clubs'.*
3. *'Topic (Project) time is nice. In topic time I like doing drawing, reading and doing dramas'*
4. *'Training helps my knowledge'.*
5. *'When its topic time, I like it very much, and have a lot of fun also'.*
6. *'I feel the best when it's Friday because I take a club and there are no training.'*

Classroom interactions throw light on certain teacher, pupil, situational characteristics. Teacher is not viewed as positional authority who 'knows the best' or is the only one who says relevant and correct, hence wiser and stronger. In actuality teachers are often seen using the phrase, "I am also learning, no one knows everything", in order to get children move, explore to seek information or facts on their own. No sharp boundaries between the one who knows and knows not are maintained. This views sometimes is taken literally by the children (because of their young age) which changes the power structure of the classroom. Since children in school are encouraged to freely express their opinions they are often not satisfied with the teachers. In some instances it was observed that teacher's lack of replies or understanding of the situation resulted in children making the situation chaotic with scoffing, ridiculing, mimicking the teachers. This, however, was a specific group feature and not a general school trend. Observations to this effect were made in one particular group.

An analysis of interactions encountered during our participant observation focuses on informal communication lines between the

students and teachers, 'powers' on 'control' does not lie with the teacher and negotiations helps to maximize student effort. The school however makes attempts and provides opportunities to increase the students sense of commitment, self-reflection and evaluation which is a step forward for maintaining a good working relationship

MIRAMBIKA LEARNING AND MLL (Minimum Levels of Learning)

Analysis of the work done by the groups, Humility and Receptivity in Languages (English, Hindi) and Mathematics was carried out in relation to the Minimum Levels of Learning set for classes IV and V (groups Humility and Receptivity correspond to these classes). The focus of the present analysis is to see the correspondence between the stated MLL's (for a specific class) and the attempts made by the school towards their attainment. Achievement levels in relation to the MLL could not be determined as the school did not permit administration of tests. The sources of data analysis were the written work of children and the observations made during our stay in the school. Data analysis reported here suffers from the constraints of limited time-period, covering only eight months of the academic year 1996-97 in the study and selection of student's copies for analysis of work done was based on availability i.e. children who were willing to share their work.

Analysis of languages reveals that in both English and Hindi the attempts made by the school for students' learning correspond to the four basic skills namely; listening comprehension, speaking, reading comprehension and writing. Transaction of language competencies takes place by integrating art, music and drama in the daily activities and making use of quizzes, story writing, writing of poems, group-discussion writing patriotic songs, short stories and preparing content materials for the school magazine to develop the intended competencies.

The school does not prescribe any books. It was observed that for English language a variety of books mostly by foreign authors were loaned from school library and being used by the students. In Hindi language classes, students were seen making use of the NCERT books prescribed for a particular class and at times even those meant for one class higher. The analysis of competencies in Mathematics for Class IV-V shows that major competencies at both class levels have been covered but at times evidence of sub-competencies under the major competency was not observable. For instance, in class V in case of decimals, evidence of conversion of binary number to decimal was available but of other sub-competencies, related to addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, evidence was not there. Concepts/competencies not stated for class IV & V have also been attempted. Writing figures in different languages (Greek, Chinese, Egyptian), the concept of quarter, decilion, quimdecibon etc. are some examples. The books used in Mathematics for these groups are those of NCERT (class IV, V and VI) besides these the students also consult other books in the library.

To conclude it can be said that the competencies stated in the MLL are content specific whereas Mirambika focusses on an activity based

learning which varies by being thematic and experience based. It is quite natural that since prescribed syllabus which form the basis of delineation of intended competencies is not adhered to in the school learning, omission of some competencies is natural. Apart from those stated in the MIL certain additional competencies which emerge from the activity based flexible curriculum transactions are developed as a collateral learning. Some distinctive features that emerged out of the analysis require special mention. These are

- Within-group differences exist among the students during observation, but not confirmed empirically
- Small size of the class makes provisions for students learning at different levels e.g. in receptivity group children are doing mathematics of class V and VI, while Algebra which is not taught in Class V usually, was introduced in group
- All the contents of Hindi (NCERT) books are not covered. Only those related to the theme of the 'projects' are undertaken
- Higher level concepts in Mathematics e.g. Algebra and in English language, (Sonnets from Shakespeare) are also introduced

Attaining MLL's in school differ mainly in terms of the processes of attaining concepts

Chapter 6

Rituals and Celebrations in Mirambika

This section examines the rituals and celebrations in relation to their aim, process and affective meaning they hold for the participants. Celebrations in Mirambika are those activities which have a special meaning for the participants and thus acquire a significant place in the school's organization. They can be seen as an expression of the school's values, an important element in the school. Mahasamadhi day, cultural days, sports day and the 'thanks giving' day along with events like inauguration of the gymnasium are some of the notable celebrations in Mirambika. At the other end are rituals which are 'routine', mundane activities like the meditation, weekly evaluations, clubs, collective lunch etc. Both, rituals and celebrations are collective expression of school's beliefs and values. Though the rituals are more predictable in nature and form part of the daily activities the celebrations are elaborate and occasionally overshadowing the routine activities in the school.

I. Rituals in School

"Rituals' i.e. routine activities like meditation, collective lunch, evaluation and clubs gain significance because of the special meaning attached to them by the participants. The routine activities in Mirambika play an important role in meeting the ideological and operative goals of the school. The affective meaning attached to these activities gives them a distinguishable character. Few of these activities as we observed and as perceived by the participants through informal talks during our stay in Mirambika are described here.

(a) '*Meditation*'; may be seen as a replacement to the morning assembly which signifies the start of the day in school. Meditation in the mornings according to official sources helps to "connect the inner (self) with outer (school) and set pace for the day". The importance of the activity lies in its function i.e. start of the day's work and completion of the day's work. Meditation is clearly located in the transcendental order aiming at self-reflection, which is in accordance with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's views on meditation, i.e. to be the path of self-knowledge, self-mastery and inner realization. In his own words Sri Aurobindo states; "In the mind's silence, the transcendent acts and the hushed heart hears the unuttered word (Savitri 19 p.315).

'Meditation' is a daily event lasting for about 8-10 minutes, accompanied by the playing of music, the children with their 'diya's' sit on durries on the floor with eyes closed and arms folded. Sometimes, messages of the Mother are also played. The music is played at fixed time both morning and evening to initiate the activity and gains significance for the participants as is evident in the observations stating that the music calms, is soothing and relaxes the person, is nice, peaceful The setting for meditation is not fixed, like other aspects of

school organization, flexibility in the choice of place was observed. Nature of the activity varied with the group, for some it was a collaborative activity where everyone sat together and performed the act. At times the older groups were instructed by their instructor on strategies for concentration and 'asanas'. According to one of the official sources, by meditating the school aims to "develop inner discipline" in the children, which is in accordance with school philosophy. Intra-group differences in performing the act were observed; these vary with the group coordinator. At times 'diyas' of younger groups sang bhajan, sat with eyes closed (children may or may not follow) sometimes they were asked to draw, sing softly and for restless children they devised walking meditation, wherein children walked around the room with eyes closed. The school sees the ritual as an attempt to help children 'look inwards' which helps to evaluate and control one's feelings like anger, jealousy etc.

Observations indicate that children show behaviours ranging from being restless, giggling, using signals to communicate, talking among themselves while others seem 'turned to' to the music and sit absolutely still with eyes open or closed in a group, completely cut-off from others and sitting alone in the corner and standing still, when music for meditation is played. The coordinating team many a time showed distress on not seeing children sit during those ten minutes, but still did not instruct them into doing so. An attempt was also made by the school to integrate the concept of meditation in their 'environment project'. Pollution was linked to inner and outer pollution. Answers to what caused mind pollution, ranged from jealousy, anger, hatred, abuse etc. to which later the children were asked to think of possible strategies to control these negative feelings. 'Meditation' was then emphasized as one such attempt to 'throw out bad thoughts'.

The purpose of 'meditation' as stated by the school coordinators is providing 'vital education i.e., control of emotions, impulses, desires which also helps to link the 'psychic' and 'spiritual' education. The latter (spiritual education) the school feels, though, is a life-long process, yet by "creating awareness of it in the child a small beginning is made" The responses of children from the four senior most groups (age 6-10 yrs) indicated that more than half of them gave expression to 'meditation' in terms of boring, useless, don't like to sit like statues, feel sleepy etc. some other children expressions on meditation were :

- I feel peaceful.
- After meditation my mind cools.
- I feel quiet and concentrated.

Most of the reactions of the children were evoked because the instructor wanted full concentration on the asanas, breathing, posture and tried to impose strict discipline during those ten minutes especially the older children. Whereas in the younger groups (3-6 years of ages) children were asked to do 'anything with concentration i.e. reading,

writing, drawing, or singing, sitting quietly during the time music is played.

(b) *Collective lunch* is one of the rituals that form a significant component of school culture, and takes place at a fixed time everyday as a routine activity. This routinised activity acquires particular significance because of cooperative efforts made by the school, symbolising the school as a community. All students (above 7 years age) participate voluntarily turn by turn to undertake serving duties during lunch. This is indicative of schools' effort to develop sense of responsibility, duty, self-help and dignity of work. The values are cultivated by these activities undertaken rather than imbibed from the rituals. The personal meaning it holds for children helps them to affirm school's effort towards cultivating values like self-restraint, patience and co-operation.

(c) *Regular evaluations* is another ritual which is of prominence and significance. This is a routine activity aimed at assessment of individual performance with a view to help children to know what has been achieved and what needs to be done. This is clearly evident of efforts made by the school in line with the philosophy, which stress on, evaluations for self-improvement and personal development and not for comparison. Self referenced assessments in school are not related to grading, ranking certification or upward mobility of classes. Joint collaborative efforts during evaluations is indicative of schools view which stresses undesirability of comparisons and competition among students in any of the school processes including assessment. These evaluations are made for developmental purpose and regular records are maintained which are used for giving feedback to the child and his parents and also for modifying teaching-learning practices.

(d) *Biweekly 'club' activities* is another notable ritual which is undertaken on regular basis. Of these, calligraphy, music, art (stick painting), mehnidi, drama, paper cutting and folding are popular ones. Children choose an activity of their own liking and work on it either individually or in groups. Hence, the nature of activity varies from being individualistic to collaborative. Significance of the activity is enhanced because of the personal meaning it has for the participants. Majority of the students find their clubs enjoyable and express the club days i.e. Wednesdays and Fridays to be the 'most enjoyable', 'best in school'. Children on completion of an activity then teach it to younger children or their peers.

II. Celebrations in Mirambika

The organisation of the 'cultural programmes' and the annual sports day are significant celebrations in school. At the same time the first of the series of cultural programmes were organised in November 1995, followed by Christmas celebrations, a cultural programme in January, 1996 and finally the Thanks Giving Day in March, 1996. The main aim of these was informal presentation of the 'arts-music', dance, drama in which the children were engaged in the preceding months.

A descriptive account of the celebrations highlights the salient features of the cultural programmes, that is, the elaborate planning by the children with 'diya's, the execution and lastly the independence given to the children to take their own decisions. Elaborate discussions crystallizes the groups view points, after each child gives his opinion on what he would like to present. The activities vary within the group as well as across groups. The students are then sub-divided into smaller groups keeping in mind the similarities in choice. In one particular instance the group (oldest group) did not want any 'diya' to help them, and were allowed to plan on their own. On the whole it was observed that the diyas were not the 'decision makers' but only helped in detailing the activities. Individual variations in the style of functioning were seen, with some diyas being more directive than others.

The importance attached to these programmes is evident as the school allots special time slots to each group for practicing their items in the 'foyer' - which incidentally was also the 'stage' for the programme. Though the programmes were informal presentations. No formal invitations were sent to the parents some came on their own. The atmosphere of gaiety and festivity enveloped the school. The programme was divided into two sessions morning and afternoon stretching from 9.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m. The symbolic presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in the foyer signified the "presence of the divine", as explained by the school officials. Ceremonial lighting of the lamp, aggarbatti's marked the start of the day's programme followed by meditation music and venna recital by the teacher trainees.

The Junior groups (red, blue, green i.e. 3, 4 and 5 years age group) presented songs and dances they were engaged in during the previous months. The presentations were in English, Hindi, Bengali, the focus was not on 'performing' but on helping young children overcome their shyness. This was evident in the fact that the group 'dijas' sang, danced and guided children on stage during the presentation of their respective item. The senior group presented items ranging from small skits, dramas, songs, magic show, gymnastics etc. The themes also varied from episodes of Sri Krishna's childhood, tales of Raja Harishchandra to contemporary materialistic values taken from western movies.

Thematically the presentations fall under two categories, namely; items based on the work the group was engaged in and those which arise out of group discussion. Participation of diyas was noteworthy with each and every one participating in the activity of their choice. However, it was observed that right from planning to presentation the 'power structure' was equal between the children and the diyas - wherein one gave way for the other in matters like dress, dialogues, items etc. Ironically, the senior group children were seen making fun (mimicry) of the item presented wholly by the diyas (based on 'Rasas'). The diyas as well as the chief coordinator at that moment were mute observers to the scene of indiscipline though later the matter was taken up for serious discussion in the weekly meetings as well as with the children. They

were made to realise their mistake by making them evaluate the situation and by self-reflecting on the happening.

Some distinctive features of 'celebrations' in Mirambika can be summarized as informality in appearance, invitation, organization, and performance. There were no formal announcements, children came on stage in a pre-decided sequence, diyas had self-assigned roles and responsibilities, and a flexible schedule accommodating those children who wanted to present solo items-probably a reaction to the atmosphere which helped them overcome their initial inhibitions. As a school source expressed, cultural programmes to be the "alive culture" of Mirambika and a part of the total learning experiences of the child. Informal talks with diyas revealed that the purpose of interim functions (series of cultural programmes) is to give each and every child a chance to express themselves in the activity of their choice, (evident from the fact that the whole school participated) and to make them confident by the year end when 'thanks giving celebrations' take place. It was stated by the coordinator that organizing cultural programme only on yearly basics aims at making the children 'perform' and when performance comes the attitudes change and competition comes in which is not in accordance with the school aim of cooperative learning. Thus, these celebrations may be seen as attempts made by the school to bring out 'unique' (hidden) potential in each child using 'Arts' as a media for self-expression.

'Thanks giving' celebrations are termed as formal by the school officials. The processes children undergo, the distinctive features of planning, organization and execution of this formal celebration remains the same as of earlier cultural programmes. Though the end-product varied with respect to being more organized, fancy costumes, special invitees, formal stage, dialogue delivery to mention a few. Like other cultural programmes the celebration took place over two days i.e. on 28th and 29th March, 1996. On the first day the younger groups presented their items in the school premises and an exhibition of their work was also put up. The presentations were marked by informality, as the children were not pressurized in performing any numbers, though a formal stage show was put up by the older groups on 29th March, which is the day Mother arrived in India in 1914. Apart from this, the celebration gains significance as it marks the end of the academic year and perhaps as alternate to year end examinations.

The art and cultural activities in Mirambika find their full and final expression in the 'Thanksgiving' preparations which according to school sources is conceptualised "as an opportunity for children to thank all those who had helped in their progress throughout the year" This celebration is seen as an expression of the ideological and operative goals of the school by the participants. Its importance for children in relation to school's ideology needs further exploration though the occasion assumes importance because of its very nature, that creates an atmosphere of festivity and makes it an event of enlivenment. At the same time it may be viewed as symbolic expression of collective participation in

school. The participants hold these celebrations in high regard and have significant meaning for them. As expressed by one of the school coordinator, "these activities help children to give expression to the creative abilities, opening of the 'psychic' and at the same time provide opportunities to work on the relationships among themselves and their diyas".

Events and occasions like 'Maha Samadhi Day' and 'Inauguration of the gym' also contribute to an overall configuration of the school culture. The Mother's Maha Samadhi Day was visualised by the school officials as the day of silence. The school, however was closed for the day keeping in mind the young children, as it would be difficult for them to observe silence. In contrast Sri Aurobindo's Maha Samadhi Day was perceived as a day of gratitude by the school. The children lighted aggarbattis in front of the photographs of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and offered flowers. They however were not clear on why they were performing the 'act'. The Mirambika children along with the M.I.S. children assembled at the Samadhi, which was bedecked with flowers. Tributes were paid by recitations from Savitri, by the school. 'The Golden Light' and other writings of Sri Aurobindo and Sanskrit hymns (presentations were made by M.I.S. only). During the homage children belonging to Mirambika were seen playing games, whispering, making fun, restless --- inspite of reprimanding by their diyas. Disinterest in the activity was apparent, significance of the activity was either not known or not understood in proper perspective. According to one of the diyas, participation of children in such events helps to get them sensitized to the messages of Sri Aurobindo. These are again evidences of conscious efforts made by the school to create awareness of the ideology on which it is based.

Celebration in Mirambika gain importance because of the fact that it takes place on days like Mother's Birthday and arrival in India. One such celebration was the inauguration of the gymnasium which coincided with the Mother's birthday. The event gains significance with the participation of the children, diyas, people from the ashram. Message of the Mother in her own handwriting is read by the chief coordinator, the tennis racquet brought specially from Pondicherry for the occasion lends the occasion a special character. Inauguration of the gym was a preliminary step to the sports day, with children making posters, writing poems, paragraphs to be displayed in the gymnasium hall. Children were seen paying obeisance to the racquet imitating their diyas. This is reaffirmation of the view of some 'dijas' regarding their role as 'service to the divine'.

Sports day celebrations is also an occasion for fulfillment of school goals i.e. promoting co-operative endeavour. The event gains significance for the diyas and children as they start the planning, detailing of the events and practicing for the sports day collectively. The school operates in accordance to the ideology, by making provisions for discourse on ideal child, developing codes of sportsmanship and making children participate in these discussions. At the same time the children were

asked to give their expressions on 'sports' by writing poems, drawing etc. The sports day mainly aimed at having fun, providing physical discipline, encouraging those who do not open-up spontaneously and also presenting school's achievements. This aspect is derived from Aurobindo's view on physical education which stresses perfection of the body to be the ultimate aim of the physical culture. Reflecting on the previous gaps, the school grouped children according to height and planned activities according to their interests. The items were mostly collaborative, participatory attempts and an evidence of no differentiation between the children on gender or age

Except for 'gymnastics presentation' which was done by a selected few students the whole school, diya and children participated in the sports day celebration. This may be viewed as reflection on school aims which emphasize 'Mirambika' as a learning centre for all : children as well as teachers'. The grand final was a significant departure from the conventional practice, as each and every child was awarded for his/her performance and absence of 'victory stand' symbolizes schools' stand on not emphasising or differentiating ranking or grading.

To conclude it can be said that the rituals and celebrations gain significance because of the nature of enacting the various activities. The cooperative work ethics forms the basis of these and becomes an integral part of the school culture. There is no gain saying that the various activities in the context of social milieu of the school does have an positive impact on the development of personal-social qualities contributing to the affective development in children. These qualities are not taught or cultivated in a planned and deliberate way but are willy-nilly inherited, imbibed and assimilated from the culture of the school which indeed is the resultant outcome of such rituals and celebrations.

Chapter 7

“DIYAS” – The Teachers in School

In understanding the real ‘world’ of the school, voices of its participants, particularly the teachers gain significance especially in view of the contributions made by them to the teaching learning process, by virtue of having their own identities and views which affect the classroom interactions. If teacher is thought of as a key initiator and determiner of all that happens in the classrooms, it becomes all the more important to gain understanding of their roles and perceptions - which ultimately give shape to children’s learning. To explore the world of the teacher in Mirambika as it exists, encapsulated within the larger world, is the focus of the present section. What is the teacher culture made up of? What are their values, beliefs, priorities and constraints in school? What are their views with regard to the ideology, transactional strategies, their roles as teachers, and activities taking place in school? These concerns were explored through informal talks, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires filled by the teachers.

There were 56 teachers during the 1995-96 session. Out of the total of 56 teachers, the full-time were 14, trainees 20 and volunteers 22. The age range of teachers in Mirambika fall within 20-25 years. The full-time teachers are those committed for life time service to Mother or ideals of Sri Aurobindo. The trainees are student’s pursuing their B.Ed. through summer course affiliated to Indore University and undergoing practice teaching in Mirambika. The volunteers are parents, grand-parents, or young people with an urge to do something different innovative in the field of education. All the three groups together comprise the “diyas” in school. The term diya is coined from the words *Didi* and *Bhaiya* (traditional way of addressing the elder brother or sister in India) and is used for teachers in school by children of all ages, their parents and by those associated in the various school activities.

Recruitment of teachers at the School

There are no fixed avenues through which teachers are recruited to Mirambika. The various entry points are :-

1. Advertisement
2. After joining vocational training courses in the Ashram
3. Through Sri Aurobindo Society Integral Schools in the states or Pondichery Ashram.
4. Personal attempts.

Since the school does not make any orderly or systematic attempts at inviting applications from people, the teachers have gained entry through various channels. An advertisement* had appeared in an newspaper and a magazine long time back (1981) which provided means of entry to a few teachers. The other sources are the vocational training

* We were unable to locate the advertisement, therefore the contents are not known.

courses in the Ashram on joining which the students who become interested in MBK and seek guidance for entry. A few came on exploration visit and "stayed on". A few others came via Pondicherry Ashram after having heard of Mirambika and its unique approach to teaching-learning. Majority of the teachers however have links with Aurobindo society or its integral schools by virtue of there family members, friends, relatives as followers of Sri Aurobindo and are serving in one of its organisations. Also, a few have made personal attempts because they had heard of the school, or was recommended by a friend. All have however one thing in common i.e. they came and they stayed because "they fell in love with the place". Majority of the teachers seem to have some sort of link with Sri Aurobindo's teaching.

Informal applications are sent by the prospective teachers to the Manager of the school, after which they are called to attend a 10-days camp. This provides them opportunity to interact with other teachers and members of the school. The prospective teachers are observed for responsibility, attitude towards work, teaching, accepting challenges, endurance etc. and through informal talks reveal their views on teaching, career are obtained. On joining all the teachers are required to fill a questionnaire to obtain information on the family background, educational qualifications, extra-curricular interests, teaching experience, aim in life and previous occupation.

An analysis of teachers' questionnaire (particularly full time and B.Ed trainees) reveals that knowledge and commitment to ideology of Sri Aurobindo is one of the qualities most sought for in a teacher. The responses of teachers to their aim in life varied from "working for Mother and Sri Aurobindo", "to be the perfect instrument of the Divine Mother", "teaching is my Sadhana", "to do divine work", "to being an ideal teacher", "to become perfect", "to be an educationist", and "to make my life worthy to live". These teachers may be seen as committed to school ideology and we may call them the "ideologues". Interests stated by teachers varied from yoga exercises, listening to music, craft work, gardening Rabindra Sangeet, batik, reading stories to children, tailoring, going through Oxford dictionary and knowing about the divine. Minimum qualification or teaching experience however, seem to find no place in recruitment of teachers.

Teachers join the school either to work for the ideals of Sri Aurobindo and Mother or because of the school image which they would like to "see for themselves", or are "interested" to know more about it. Free boarding and lodging to some teachers is also a motivating factor. Analysis of questionnaires shows that the teachers in Mirambika vary with regard to their perceptions and commitment to school ideology and this also affects their understanding of the school activities. A brief look at the perceptions of the three groups of teachers is given as under.

I. Full - Time Teachers

The teachers opined that the teaching-learning system in Mirambika is flexible and provides freedom to work which makes the child an independent learner. Restrictions from outside are not imposed on the children, instead the child is made aware of sense of responsibility and time which in turn creates "inner discipline". Each teacher develops his/her own strategies which keeps changing according to the context. Inability to handle situations or children they felt, is the result of inexperience. Work in school, they felt is done on basic trust and feelings of team work where competition with peers finds no place. According to them Mirambika is a "mini-world", which provides wide horizons to the child to choose his learning activities. Impartial, free and informal exchange of information establishes healthy personal bonds between diyas and children. This according to the teachers makes Mirambika a learning centre for both; diyas as well as children. It was also expressed that the school adopts a flexible calendar of activities, which does not put any time constraints on learning and to a large extent is need based. In accordance to the school goals teachers felt that children not having to adhere to a "uniform" highlights the uniqueness of each child. As one of the teachers expressed, "positive uniformity of thoughts and actions" is more important, while another felt that "uniformity at inner grounds" should be focussed upon.

The teachers felt that mediation helps to connect the home and school, to relax one's mind, and to concentrate. They expressed that the effect of meditation cannot be quantified; some felt that immediate gains may not be evident however, long term gains will surely be there. They also felt that through mediation the school is making small beginning by helping children to reflect on themselves. Teachers view their relationship with parents as "wonderful", open and feel that parents involvement in child's work at school or at home is a lot. Though some felt that at times the parents are "critical" of teachers in school. The full-time teachers however, share parental concern for frequent teacher shift in school because of a large number of volunteers.

Some of the full-time teachers have plans to leave Mirambika, either due to of family reasons, or for more learning. But it was stated that they would continue to work for the Mother and Sir Aurobindo. One teacher plans to implement free progress system of education in a college, another wants to be a "perfect instrument of Divine". Ideology was the key factor for joining Mirambika and remains so for future plans to of the full time teachers.

II. Teachers

The trainees expressed that Mirambika in itself symbolises freedom. However, they felt it to be a difficult teaching system, as nothing is forced on the student. According to them Mirambika is a training centre for teachers as well as children. It gives the teachers

freedom to implement new strategies since time and syllabus constraints do not operate.

They also expressed that B.Ed teaching practice has limited applicability and they might have to experience difficulty in applying to other schools. This dilemma existed clearly in the second year students whereas the new entrants i.e. first year students were not clear on its applicability.

Like the full-time teachers, trainees too were of the view that inner-discipline and stability of mind was more important. Not having a uniform in school according to a few trainees destroys the traditional mindset. They too like the full-time teachers felt the need to stress 'inner' uniformity and believed that meditation is one of the means to inner discipline.

The trainees expressed their relationship with fellow teachers as 'beautiful', 'nice', 'good' combined with healthy arguments. They felt Mirambika to be like a family. Trainees felt their relationship with children to be friendly and emotional in nature. "The bond is very strong" they expressed and feel that frequent changes in teachers affect the child. Some trainees opined that children at times misuse the freedom given to them and lack of knowledge of one's culture and materialistic values were certain concerns expressed by them. Most of the trainees felt that parents contribute a lot in school activities like projects, plays, model making etc. Interactions with parents are "trust-based", 'good', 'open' felt some.

They aspire for higher degrees like M. Phil and Ph. D. or to compete for civil services. Others wanted to be good teachers or work for a social cause, to be an 'ideal learner', to 'keep on learning till the end of life', were some of their expressions.

III. VOLUNTEERS : THE PART-TIME TEACHERS

Volunteers too opined that Mirambika is a learning centre for teachers as well as children, especially in view of its flexible curriculum, no pressure of syllabus, and evaluations gives the child freedom in learning. Independence of thought, expression and decision they felt were the result of opportunity for experimentation provided by the school. They expressed concern regarding the school having non-salaried teachers and more so to provide personal attention to train volunteer teachers to school philosophy and Aurobindo's ideals. They felt Mirambika was an alternative to existing education system in India and provides a stress-free environment of learning.

The volunteers view teaching-learning in the school as efforts to inculcate moral and ethical values through joyful activities. They felt that the school gives the teachers ample time and opportunity to allow each child optimum space, time and context to develop his interests and personality. Volunteers opined that no hard and fast rules are followed, teaching proceeds through experimentation and takes shape according to

child's needs and desires. Child is encouraged to reason, raise questions, queries and 'discover knowledge for himself' was expressed by the volunteer teachers.

Volunteers however were sceptical regarding the boundaries of discipline as defined by the school. Relationship with children however is viewed as warm, open and 'having good rapport' Mirambika teachers consider them as 'my children' and not as students in school expressed the volunteers.

Majority of the volunteers were of the opinion that the teachers and parents interact often as the school and the classrooms are open for the parents. Fixed timings or days do not govern interactions with parents. According to the volunteers school often takes the initiative to contact parents and work out collaborative strategies for handling any specific problem the child may be having. In their aspirations for future, "Sewa" was a common factor that emerged from talks with volunteers.

All teachers in Mirambika perceived themselves as reflective 'learners', open to exchange of information with the children. The three groups of teachers i.e. full-time, trainees and volunteer held similar views regarding approach to teaching, and flexibility of curriculum was viewed as a strength which helps them meet the needs of children. Volunteers, however, differed in their opinion on discipline and wanted to enforce discipline among students. Teaching strategies varied across individual teachers but were need based. Volunteers though were bit more structured than their other counterparts and blamed it on 'lack of guidance' by senior teachers in school. We may say that the philosophical orientation or lack of it across the different groups of teachers probably results in their viewing schools' goal of inner discipline differently. Despite lack of philosophical orientation or ideological commitment the volunteers, trainees and full-time teachers have a common goal of service to mankind, or to provide a child-centered education in accordance to child's needs whereas a few take their role as 'Sewa' social service to mankind.

The schools ideological goals though provide guidelines for action, factors like teacher's potential, commitment to ideology influence the role performance of teachers in Mirambika. Teachers' performance is also influenced by allocation of responsibilities by the school and the school makes provisions to keep teachers interests in mind while assigning a particular group (class) or subject (during training time). Except for some volunteers who are subject specialists all teachers are involved in project work.

Teachers in Mirambika however perform multiple roles, they are front office helpers, physical instructors, music teachers, and also who looks after the physical needs of the children. This holds true especially in the absence of helpers for younger children, where at times the teachers help children with their soiled clothes. The picture which emerges of the teachers in Mirambika is of a multifaceted worker.

External pressures in the form of parental concern for competitive examination at times pressurize the teachers and authorities in school. Also, certain issues of concern to the school, take the shape of school pressures for teachers. For instance, teachers are expected by the school to see that parents do not academically pressurize the child at home by providing tuitions, make attempts to change the materialistic, western values of the children, and to implement successfully the spiritual basis of Sri Aurobindo's educational philosophy in Mirambika

Chapter 8

Parental Perspective

It hardly needs any mention that parents' voice should also be heard besides the teachers and the students because parents comprise a significant group of participants in the various school activities by way of their contributions, involvement, pressures and opinions. Therefore, the perceptions and expectations of parents of the children studying in Mirambika and also, of those who on completion of their studies had joined M.I S were examined.

Parents in Mirambika came from varied backgrounds, educational qualifications, values and norms, that get reflected in their interaction with the school and the child, which in turn governs the child's attitude towards school work and other related issues like subject-choice, grading, competition or orientation towards careers. Parents' culture is, therefore, a kind of special entity in itself, distinct and dominant that influences the child's social world in Mirambika, the system of imparting knowledge, the role of ideology, teacher qualifications etc. Therefore, parents' understanding, of what the school is, offers a meaningful perspective to understand the school and its processes. Attempt is made to depict the world of parents and seek answers to questions like the following

- Why did you choose Mirambika for education of your child?
- What are its strengths and weaknesses?
- How do they view the school philosophy?
- Does the school impart what it propagates?
- How do they view the parent-teacher meetings?
- What problems the students face after joining MIS?

Data pertaining to parents' perceptions was obtained by interviewing them. Attempt was made to interview both the parents. Information collected through questionnaire ranged from age, occupations, income, number of children, views on school ideology, strategies of teaching, teachers' evaluations and school's future plans. A representative sample of 104 parents (out of 127) from each class group in Mirambika and out of the total 28 parents whose children had joined MIS, 21 constituted the sample for the parent-interviews. An analysis of the data presents a view of the 'Mind' of parent who comes to MBK, their thoughts reactions and views on the working of the school.

Parents' Background : Bird's eye view

In all 125 parents participated in the study. Of these, 103 parents are working couples; information on 11 mothers could not be obtained. 86 fathers were working in government or private sector jobs or were professionals like doctors, engineers and teachers. These were followed by 21 who were in business ranging from garment dealers and furnishers.

to private practitioners in medicine. Nine of them were free-lancers like painters, journalists, writers and sculpturists. Some of these parents possess a professional degree or had attained academic excellence (like being an XLRI topper, or MBA from MIITS), instead they chose to pursue a career of their interest, howsoever remotely it may have been linked to their qualification. Of the women in service 74 comprised the highest category of working mothers followed by housewives, 22 in number, 12 free lancers and 6 business entrepreneurs.

The minimum educational qualification of the parents was graduation. Out of these 12 were divorced or separated couples and one was a widow. The monthly income of these parents varied from five thousand rupees per month to two lakh rupees a month. Data did not reveal occupational information about 9 fathers who are NIR's or having business outside India. Majority of the parents were also members of some or the other organisation.

Nuclear families dominated the home front scenario. Of the 92, almost one-third i.e. 33 families were living in a joint set-up. Data were not available for two families. Majority of the nuclear families however, were a link with their older generation and the children meet them quite frequently, in some cases every day since the grand-parents stay with the children till the parents returned from their jobs.

Thirty one were single child families, ninety were of two children and four were three children families. This shows that one fourth population in Mirambika consisted of families having single child. Of the total, ninety three children were first born. One third of the children had separate place to study and sleep while the rest shared it with their siblings or parents. Eighty percent of these children used the school transport for commuting. In all only 18 students got pocket money (10 got under Rs. 50 and 8 got under Rs. 400 pm) and the remaining 88 did not get any allowance from their parents. Data revealed information on facilities available at home which ranged from television to Internet. Except for two families each one had a T.V. set at home. The time spent on watching T.V. varied between half an hour to one and a half hours daily. About fifty percent had computers while some have E-mail, internet and CD's on their computers.

To summarize, it may be said that majority of the children in Mirambika belonged to high socio-economic background or the upper strata of urban society in Delhi.

Recollections of Mirambika

To these parents, Mirambika refers primarily to its being a non-conforming school, with no uniform and prescribed syllabus, no time-tabled day, or the burden of home work. Dissatisfaction with the existing education system, examinations, rigid class structure, over-burdening by books, schedules etc. led them to choose it for their children's education. They wanted a school 'which would help him celebrate his childhood', facilitate overall development and is like a second home rather than a

'business centre like most of the schools of today'. For most of the parents it was love at first sight, whether they came to know of its existence from a friend, or through an advertisement or an article in a magazine (the school has not made any uniform attempt to publicise its existence, though small bits of information had seen light in the traditional world from time to time). A few had the privilege of viewing a video-cassette of 'Child's day in Mirambika', while for some others the total ambiance of the school was in itself a motivation to send their child to this school. However, a few parents had some link with the Aurobindo Ashram as devotees or through relatives in Pondicherry which provided a base for their decision. It was also discovered during the course of interviewing them that the investigators were amidst parents who wore a different outlook towards life, schooling and success. Disillusionment of the parents with their own schooling in a traditional set-up, emerged as the key factor in selecting Mirambika since they did not want the child to experience what they had gone through.

Perspectives on Mirambika -- The School

The school environment ambiance seems to be the important consideration for parents to send their children to Mirambika. Open surroundings and lush green environment according to the parents is evidence of school's openness to the learning experiences provided to the child. They feel that the school believes in socializing the child, allowing them to express their ideas freely amidst the natural set up. Far away from structured regime, time constraints and regimentation of a traditional school, they felt that Mirambika focuses on each child as a separate entity, with his own set of needs and capacities and organises activities that centers around the child. According to them the school focuses on overall development of the child which lays foundations for the child to develop self-confidence and self-reliance.

Majority of the parents revealed lack of their understanding of school's ideology. It was after getting their child admitted that they became aware of the ideology but were sceptical of it, being made the basis of various activities in the school. However, they feel that traces of it are found in certain ceremonial and ritualistic occasions like meditation, mahasamadhi day, etc. However, there is enough evidence of ideological underpinnings in various school processes like evaluations, organization of sports, cultural programmes, nature of learning activities and some other aspects of social life of the school.

The two key factors that emerge as facilitators for children's learning during parent interviews are the role of 'Diyas' (teachers) and the teaching learning approach used i.e. project work. Parents opined that, this approach helps the children to 'explore themselves', 'left free to learn whatever interests them'; 'children can relate to whatever is taught'; 'makes the children self-motivated, confident and provides clarity of the subject matter'. Also, according to them teaching-learning in Mirambika does not take place within the constraints of time or the syllabus of examinations. Children gain practical knowledge as they are encouraged

to get first hand information by exploring nature before the relevant books are consulted. Learning this way, the parents feel is permanently imprinted in their minds. One or two parents did differ and felt that teaching learning in Mirambika makes the child confident but does not equip him with adequate skills and knowledge necessary for the world outside. They feel the project approach to be an antithesis of traditional teaching through books where subject matter is learnt by cramming and see the traditional system as an aggressive system of education. Whereas learning through projects, they feel, helps the children to express their ideas freely, without burdening them with the home work and class work. Evaluations in school according to the parents are factual descriptions of the child's work and did not aim at a comparative picture of the child and his peers

The parents, however, showed discontentment with the uncertainty of shifting of children to a traditional school with its traditionally oriented board examinations. They expressed that either Mirambika should provide some formal training to the children to compete with the world outside, or should be upgraded so as to help children avoid the shift from co-operative to competitive learning environment

Teachers emerge as key facilitators of children's learning. Parents' view teachers as 'friends' of children, sensitive to their needs, affectionate, sincere, committed to work, open to suggestions and having a strong bond between the teacher and the taught. Almost all the parents acknowledge the 'teacher' as a significant contributor to their children's learning, of course. A few parents, however, felt that some teachers are too 'immature' and behave in childish manner. They also resented excessive concern of some teachers with ideology and teachings of Aurobindo.

Parents dis-satisfaction with teachers, however is also related to less number of trained teachers and high turnover of volunteers, trainee teachers and other teachers. Since teachers are not salaried staff in Mirambika but are paid only a nominal fellowship, 'teacher' selection is made keeping in mind his or her ideological commitment. The remaining staff strength is completed by taking in volunteers to do the teaching. There is consensus to a large extent among parents to stress the need for pressurising the school for paying handsome salaries to teachers and select qualified and experienced ones and undo the damage of emotional bonding on frequent changes. On the one hand, they feel that the present teachers are the 'guiding force', a 'resource' in school and mantle of child's learning is laid on their heads. On the other hand is their demand of qualified experienced teachers. Ambivalence in parents view gets reflected in their talk.

There is constant pressure on the school for stable leadership, equipping children with requisite academic skills (linked to qualified teachers), upgrading of the school (to avoid trauma of shift to a traditional learning system), identifying 'qualified' teachers and effect of high teacher turnover on the child. The school in turn expects parents

not to pressurise children with tuitions, to bring about a change in the westernised, materialistic values of children and to develop their interest in the spiritual basis of the educational philosophy of Mirambika.

Parents of children who have joined MIS after Mirambika felt the shift is like two extremes from co-operation to competition, natural to rigid structured learning, knowledge to marks oriented culture and child in constant fear of evaluations which ultimately result in evaluating one's ownself with those of his or her peers. They felt that the constant striving for more marks makes the child dependent on the teachers and reinforces rote memorization of the subject matter without understanding it at times.

The parents blamed the education system which they felt is 'linear'. Subjects are taught without any relation to one another. The one-shot assessment of the children fails to capture the real calibre and intellect of the child. As one mother stated, the system is trying to manufacture beautiful puppets out of the children, devoid of feelings, emotions, spontaneity, learning The schools go on with their ritualistic, stagnant approach to teaching and learning thereby making students suffer from the fear of being left out of the rat race of competitive examinations and entry into the institutions of professional excellence. The parents seemed disillusioned with their 'dream', and reality is something they cannot identify with; the child too is a product of this dilemma.

Chapter 9

Performance Indicators

Achievement of 28 students who, after completing schooling in Mirambika, and were studying in classes VI to XII in Mothers' International School was examined by making a thorough study of their report cards of the current year of study and of previous years. Analysis of academic achievement was carried out for (i) each child separately ; (ii) subjectwise, and (iii) class as a group. The board results of classes X and XII provide a picture of Mirambika children in a competitive public examination.

Perceptions of parents, teachers and the children were obtained through unstructured interviews and informal talks on what is a Mirambika child like ? Certain specific styles of functioning, behaving and other characteristics have emerged after analysing the interview data. Certain difficulties faced by these children in a conventional set-up have also emerged which may be attributed to lack of exposure of children to aspects which do not find place in Mirambika's approach to teaching-learning.

This section attempts to provide a view of the Mirambika child in a traditional school set-up -- How the child is viewed by his teachers and parents? How the children themselves view Mirambika ? What difficulties are faced in a traditional education system? How has Mirambika equipped them for future? How do children from Mirambika perform in different academic subjects ? How do they adjust to the changed learning environment? Report cards of the students provided a comprehensive picture of their achievement scores in each subject in the two terminal examinations i.e. first semester (Oct-Nov) and final examination (March). Besides the achievement scores, their attendance, their teachers' remarks on pupils' performance in each subject, participation in co-curricular activities, general behaviour and personality traits are some other aspects mentioned in the report cards. Performance in all the subjects is shown in terms of marks as well as grades, except for computer science, work experience and physical education in which only grades are awarded.

Students of Mirambika studying in classes Vith to XIIth in MIS during the time of research constituted the group under investigation. Of the 28 students (15 boys and 13 girls) studying during the 1996-97 session, 2 were in VIth class, 7 in VIIth class, 4 in VIIIth class, 6 in IXth class, 3 in Xth class, 5 in XIth class, and 1 in XIIth class.

Methodology of Grading : (i) In Classes VI to VIII grading is done on a nine point letter scale for which students of a particular class (across all sections) are rank ordered and graded using the following criteria :

Table : 9.1

Grade	Range of Marks	
A-1: A-2:	Top 1/8th of the passed candidates in the class. Next 1/8th of the passed candidates in the class.	75% & above
B-1: B-2:	Next 1/8th of the passed candidates in the class. Next 1/8th of the passed candidates in the class.	60 - 75%
C-1: C-2:	Next 1/8th of the passed candidates in the class. Next 1/8th of the passed candidates in the class.	50 - 60%
D-1: D-2:	Next 1/8th of the passed candidates in the class. Next 1/8th of the passed candidates in the class.	40 - 50%
E :	Failed candidates in the class	

(ii) The students from Class IX to Class XII are assessed on the basis of first term (25 marks), annual examination (50 marks) and internal assessment (25 marks) which comprises of class tests, home assignments and project work. Aggregate percentage of marks is taken as the final score. The grading for Class IX onwards is done on the basis of percentage of marks using the criteria shown in the following table :

Table 9.2

Grade	Range of marks	Grade	Range of marks
A	75 & above	E	30 – 40
B	60 – 75	F	20 – 30
C	50 – 60	G	Below 20
D	40 – 50		

(iii) The report cards for these classes show subject-wise marks, attendance, position in class, co-curricular activities, personality traits and general remarks columns.

I SUBJECTWISE ANALYSIS OF CLASSES VI TO VIII

A brief subject-wise analysis of students studying in Classes VI to VIII is presented in Table 9.3. It provides grades obtained in English, Hindi, Maths, Social Studies, General Science and Sanskrit. Data of total 13 students across different classes i.e. 2 in Class VI, 7 in Class VII and 4 in Class VIII are shown. The table provides a picture of each individual's performance (grade-wise) and also of the group as a whole in subjects like English, Hindi, Mathematics, Social Studies, General Science and Sanskrit. Subject wise analyses of grades is presented as under :

English : The table clearly shows that students of these classes have performed very well in English. Out of a total of 13 students, performance of 5 students is above average as they got grades within the range of A1 to B2, while one student got grade E and failed. Performance of 4 students is average as they got grade C1 and remaining 5 students performance is below average as they got grades C1 to D2.

Hindi : Majority of the Mirambika students performance in Hindi is very poor across all classes from VI to VIII. This is also quite apparent from the table which shows that out of 13 students, performance of only 3 students is above average as they got grades between A2 to B1. Performance of the remaining 10 students in Hindi is below average as eight got grades within the range of C2 to D2 and the remaining four students got grade E i.e. they were unable to secure minimum pass marks.

Mathematics : The performance of majority of the students, in Maths is within average to below average. A few students managed to secure grades A1 to B1 though none failed in the subject but maximum students performance was below 60% marks.

Social Studies : The performance of 6 students is above average as they secured grades between A1 to C1, while the rest of the students secured grades C2 to D2 showing their below average performance in the subject.

General Science : Performance of 7 students in general science is above average and fall in the grade range A1 to C1. Performance of remaining 6 students was between C1 to D2 grades and one student got grade E i.e. failed.

Sanskrit : Students have performed very poorly in Sanskrit. Out of 13, students performance of 9 is below average out of which 3 students were unable to secure even the minimum pass marks. Only 4 students were able to get grades within A1 to B2 grades indicating above average performance in the subject.

To sum up it can be said that MBK students in class VI to VIII do not perform well in subjects like Hindi, Sanskrit (only 23% students

Class : VI to VIII
Session 1996-97
Total No. of Ss : 13

Table No. 9.3
SUBJECT-WISE PERFORMANCE
(INDIVIDUAL & GROUP)

GRADES OBTAINED

S.N.	Classes/ Subject	VI		VII								VIII			
		C2	E	C1	A2	D2	C1	A2	A1	B2	A2	C2	E	D1	C1
1.	English	C2	E	C1	A2	D2	C1	A2	A1	B2	A2	C2	E	D1	C1
2.	Hindi	C2	E	D1	A2	D1	E	A2	B1	D2	D1	E	E	D1	D1
3.	Maths	C2	D1	C2	A1	D1	D2	B1	B2	C1	C2	D2	D1	D2	D2
4.	S St.	D2	C2	C1	A1	D2	C2	B2	A2	B2	A2	D1	D1	D1	D1
5.	G. Sci	C1	D1	C1	A2	D2	C2	A2	B2	B1	A2	E	D2	D1	D1
6.	Sanskrit	B2	C2	C2	A2	C2	D1	A1	A2	E	C2	E	E	D2	D2

got above average grades) and to some extent in Mathematics with only 31% students getting above average grades. Their performance is appreciable in subjects like English, Science and Social Studies i.e. 69%, 54% and 56% respectively performing above average. According to their teachers poor performance is because languages like Hindi and Sanskrit are not given due weightage compared to English during project work in Mirambika. Sanskrit was not taught as a subject in school. Besides this the parents and teachers felt that the students in Mirambika are never forced to do written work and the choice of doing written work was left to the individual child, therefore they have problems in written expression. However, there are few students who have performed exceptionally well in all the subjects and their written expression and ideas are also appreciated by the teachers. It was also expressed by the subject teacher that the students have very weak basics of mathematics, some are even unable to do basic arithmetic calculations.

Maximum students failed in subjects like Hindi followed by Sanskrit. None failed in Social Studies and Mathematics. However, in Mathematics maximum number of students secured below average grades.

II. PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS (CLASSES IX TO XII)

Class IXth onwards the grading system is different from those of lower classes i.e. VI to VIII. Grades are awarded according to the aggregate percentage. In Table 9.4 provides a comprehensive profile of students from Class IX to XII with regard to their position and percentage in class. The pre-board and board results for classes X to XII are also depicted. During the 1996-97 session 15 students of Mirambika were studying classes IX – XII in M I S.

Class IX : In all Six students were studying in class IX. Three fall in the range of 70%, two in 60% range while only one student got 40%. Their relative standing in class is evident in the positions mentioned in Table 8.1.

Class X : Class X had three students. Table 9.4 shows the percentage range of these students in Class IX and Class X and also pre-board and board results. Pre-Board results show that out of three students only one student got 71% marks while the other two got 42% and 56% respectively. Their performance in the class X board examination showed improvement as compared to the pre-board results. Two students fall in the percentage range of 70% - 80% while the remaining student secured 81% marks in Xth boards.

Class XI : Class XI had five students, three in science stream, one in commerce and another one in humanities. All the 5 students came from MBK in class IX i.e. the 1994-95 academic session. As it is evident from the table the overall performance of 4 students in class IX is above average and fall in the percentage range 70% to 90%, while the remaining one student scored 50%. Class X board examination results show that

Table 9.4

Aggregate Performance of Students (

Class	IX		X						XI							
	IX		IX		Pre-Board		X Board		IX		Pre-Board		X Board		XI	
No	%	Post	%	Post	%	Post	%	Post	%	Post	%	Post	%	Post	%	Post
1	79.3	1/35	55.5	17/35	56	29/31	75.4		81.7	1/31	83.2	1/33	89		88.9	2/29
2	74	10/35	69.0	16/34	71.2	9/31	81.6		72.5	4/32	75	4/31	81		67.6	13/29
3	77.4	6/38	46.7	33/36	42.9	28/28	72.8		79.1	2/31	79.1	3/33	84		76.5	5/29
4	62.3	22/37							70.8	7/31	58	14/33	75		Medical Leave	
5	59.9	24/37							50.7	23/32	53.8	25/31	68			
6	12.8	33/38														

one student falls in the range of 60% - 70%, one of 70% - 80% range while the other three students got percentages between 80% to 90%. Out of 4, the student from commerce stream got 48.16%; 3 students from science stream performed very well as they got 88.9%, 76.5% and 67.61% respectively. Apparently, the students from science stream did very well. In co-curricular activities also all these students have performed especially well in sports, cultural activities, debates etc. Two of these students have been given "All Rounder of the Year" award by the school in Xth as well as in XIIth class.

According to the Principal and the class teachers this particular batch was the best upto now. This is because they joined MIS in class IXth (other batches join MIS in class VI) and were also academically oriented to the change they were going to face after leaving Mirambika. Before joining MIS the children were taught for one full year in a traditional school manner in addition to Mirambika's project approach. They were also prepared for written work, taking tests, preparing for exams etc. This probably contributed to their better academic adjustment and success after joining M.I.S.

Class XII : There was only one student (1996-97) in class XII who had joined MIS in class VI after studying in Mirambika. In IX he got 71.19% in his final examination, and in Xth class board examination 72% were secured. In XIth class he opted for science stream and he secured 56%. Class XII in pre-board examination he secured 61.7% and in board examination 78% marks were secured. According to the class teacher he is an exceptionally good sportsman and participates in zonal athletics, basket-ball tournaments etc.

To conclude it may be said that the academic profiles of 28 students from Mirambika studying in classes VI to XII reflect on their ability to adjust to new learning environment at MIS. Their grades are indicative of the efforts made especially in subjects like Sanskrit and Hindi. The board results are a clear indication of having adjusted to the situation.

To Sum up :

Data generated by examining the academic records of the 28 students who joined MIS from Mirambika show different levels of performance in various classes and subjects. It is evident that for majority of these students Hindi and Sanskrit are their weak areas. According to subject teachers' their basics of the language are very "poor". This may be because Hindi language is not given much weightage in the project work in Mirambika as compared to English. Sanskrit, however, finds no place in the school curriculum. Individual differences exist among students in these subjects since some students have performed exceptionally well even in Hindi and Sanskrit. This may be attributed to their interest in the language or may be due to parental support or the tuitions they may be having at home, as has been expressed by some parents.

Teachers are also critical of their written work and remarks like "written expression is very poor", "cannot express concepts in writing" were often given in students' report cards. Written work whether in English, Hindi or General Science, emerged as the main area of weakness of Mirambika children. As remarked by teachers 'their verbal expression is wonderful, but when it comes to expressing in writing they face problems' Teachers were also of the opinion that these children were not good in taking tests and did not know how to prepare for the examinations.

The findings are suggestive of the strengths of the project work approach followed in Mirambika. It strengthens the students by making them resourceful, initiative taking, responsible for their work and inculcates searching skills, reasoning power and experimentation. However, Mirambika should provide the children with sufficient experiences of written work, expressing in specified time and space or exposing them to test taking skills or study habits. Though multi disciplinary approach to teaching-learning is advantageous at primary grades as it helps to link concepts across different subject areas, however with increase in grade level the subject matter gets more specific and apart from comprehending the matter a student must have skills to express their knowledge for others to understand. In Mirambika even during the specific subject training time i.e. teaching of English, Hindi, Maths the students in line with schools ideological goals are not forced to take up anything, and before assigning any work to the child his/her interest and level of performance is taken into consideration. This may be beneficial for some especially those performing average but it may lead the others to under-estimate the importance of certain activities which happen to be a significant part of traditional school curriculum. Inclusion of specific written exercises at different age levels as a part of project work may prove to be beneficial for the students.

The results are also suggestive of need for pre-preparation and orientation of Mirambika students to the traditional teaching-learning-evaluation system. As evident in one group i.e. (XI of 1996-97 session) these children were academically prepared for one full year before they joined M.I.S. Parents as well as teachers also felt that this gradual shift from Mirambika to MIS helped students to adjust and be successful in a traditional schooling system. Another possible reason is the difference in age and maturity level when a child shifts from Mirambika after class V and after class VIII as in case of this particular group.

Chapter 10

The Mirambika Child

The role of school experiences in shaping the personal-social development of children cannot be overlooked. There is also evidence to suggest that children's attitude to school, their behaviour in school and their self-image is largely influenced by their experiences while in school (Kerry and Eggleston, 1990 : 241).

This section examines the perceptions of teachers, parents and children with regard to child's experiences in Mirambika, attitudes towards school work, out-look towards life, expectations from MIS and future goals.

Informal talks and interviews with the participants contributed towards delineating certain characteristics or behaviour patterns typical of Mirambika children. Analysis revealed that Mirambika's efforts are viewed in making children 'thinking individuals', confident, accepting responsibility, of action and inculcating values like dignity of labour sharing, co-operation and receptivity to others as depicted in Fig. 10.0.

Data were generated over a period of six months, through interviews and informal talks with the parents and teachers of 28 students, 15 boys and 13 girls studying in Mother's International School during 1996-97 academic session. In all 20 parents and 19 class-teachers of classes VI-XII helped to build the profile of these children. What emerges from the children's perspective is, the various aspects they learn to live with and without and the one of significance to them is learning to live in M.I.S. without 'diyas'. Analysis of data is presented in the form of emerged categories or modes of behaving. Each of these are presented separately as the voices of children, parents and teachers in Table 10.0 and are described below :

Confident Learner : Mirambika children are perceived as 'armed with confidence' and being "very confident". It was expressed that the Mirambika system of learning "encourages the child to come forward and do whatever they like without the fear of being compared with his peer group. Confidence in the child makes them clear about their life-goals i.e. their likes and dislikes and can thus take their own decisions, was expressed the parents. They also felt that the children "accept responsibility for making good or bad decisions". This they felt was the result of Mirambika providing enough space to the child to experiment and learn from one's mistakes, which helps them to take decisions and makes them practical and optimistic. They were also called "adventurous" and "dynamic" by the parents and teachers.

Teachers opined that the Mirambika children are 'very resourceful in the right manner', being responsible makes them complete the assigned work quickly. It was felt by the teachers that this is because in Mirambika's system of teaching-learning the teacher functions as a

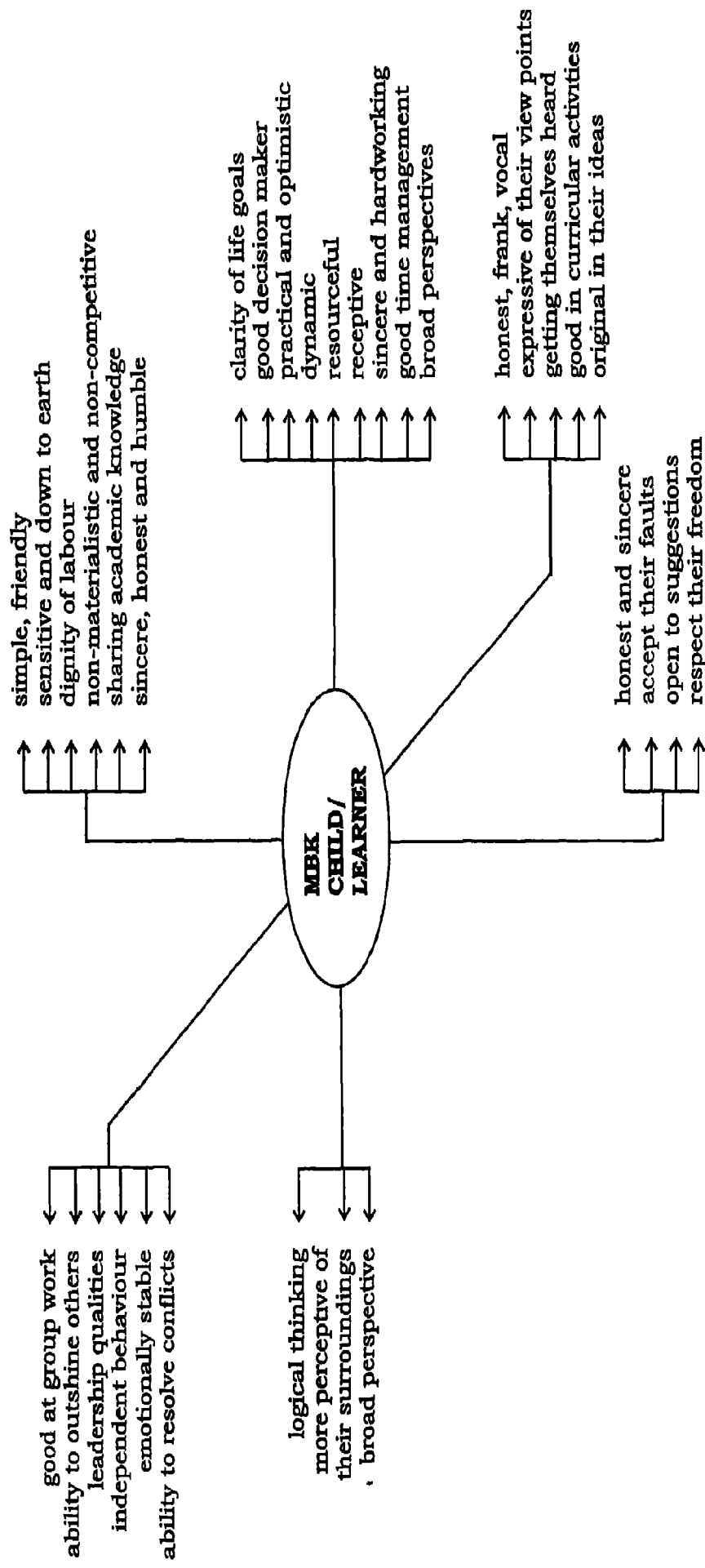


Fig. 10.0

facilitator This makes children independent learners in the sense that they search for information/knowledge on their own. Some teachers further expressed that, "if you want any work done you should tell Mirambika child and it will be done" Teachers felt that these children have "broad perspectives" and are "aware of what is happening" (receptive) which leads them to the right source to complete the assigned job/work Some teachers revealed that after coming to MIS, the children put extra efforts to come upto the standards of the class During the informal talks with teachers quite often they children were referred to as "sincere" and "hardworking".

Time-management emerged as another assert of the children. According to some teachers the children are clear about their life-goals and prioritise their work" However, certain teachers had contradictory opinions and expressed that the Mirambika children are "over-confident about themselves", "do whatever they feel is right", "do not listen to the teachers" and "create disturbance in the class". This view of the teacher may have arisen due to non-conforming behaviour of the children to the traditional classroom expectations of the teacher, this was expressed by the students themselves.

Expressive : According to the parents and teachers, being honest, frank and expressive are some other typical behaviours of the Mirambika child. As expressed by parents the freedom given to the child in Mirambika allows them to put forward their views without being 'ridiculed' or 'laughed at'. This helps them to become vocal and expressive of their view points Because of being 'heard', instills in them the quality of 'getting themselves heard' said one parent As expressed by a student, "we mirambika kids are quite a fighter in the sense that we cannot tolerate anything wrong". However, a few teachers in M.I.S did not appreciate their being frank and expressive and considered it to be a sign of indiscipline and rude behaviour As expressed by a teacher, 'they don't have respect for their teachers, and they say whatever they feel like'

Teachers also opined that by being expressive, the Mirambika child has an 'upper-hand' over MIS children and do very well in co-curricular activities like debates, declamations etc. An English teacher commented that, 'their style of writing is very original' and language is not bookish. She further added that, "they always come up with very original ideas which at times ourselves also cannot think of".

Self-discipline : Parents and teachers felt that honesty is valued by Mirambika children and they will not 'fib' or lie, and felt that the children accept their faults and are open to suggestions. Teachers too expressed that 'Mirambika children are honest and sincere with their teachers' as they 'don't hide anything from them'. Children also viewed themselves as 'very disciplined', which was further strengthened by saying 'you will never find a Mirambika child ever bunking classes'. Children expressed that they were more disciplined because of freedom they had got in Mirambika. It was clearly stated by some children that 'if you are given

Table 10.1

**Perceived Student Characteristics by Parents,
Teacher and Students themselves**

S.No.	Perceived attributes of student characteristics	Parents N = 19	Teachers N = 20	Child N = 28
1.	Confident	10	16	6
2.	Truthful	2		1
3.	Wider Perspective	2		6
4.	Disciplined			3
5.	Friendly/Lively/interactive	2	2	8
6.	Optimistic/Want to enjoy excrymin.	3		4
7.	Logical	1		3
8.	Sincere	1		2
9.	Independent	2	3	2
10.	Self-Respect	1		2
11.	Kindn			1
12.	Respects others	3		3
13.	Make themselves heard			1
14.	Feraless			1
15.	Expressive/articulate (not disciplined)	1	6	
16.	Frank		3	
17.	Non-Competitive, ambitions but not jealous	3	3	3
18.	Responsible	2	2	5
19.	Honest	5		
20.	Good time management	1		5
21.	Not materialistic	5		
22.	Sense of Superiority		3	
23.	Outspoken		1	
24.	Boss over others		1	
25.	Clear about life's goals	3		1
26.	Thinking individual	2		1
27.	Not good in Writing skills and Hindi and Sanskrit	2	5	1
28.	Resourceful		5	
29.	Dynamic		2	
30.	Creative		1	

freedom you don't misuse it, but in a strict environment one feels like breaking the rules'.

Information Seekers : Apart from being independent and responsible learners their style of learning may be termed as 'information seekers'. Teachers feel that the children are 'really very enthusiastic about learning and gaining knowledge', this urge makes them refer to books, materials and other resources. Parents feel that for their children 'learning is an enjoyable process as they have developed strong craving for knowledge'. Children give Mirambika the credit for helping them develop an interest in studies. Majority of the children expressed that 'they don't study to pass exams but because they want to gain knowledge'. They further expressed that they have the potential to learn which may be attributed to project approach to teaching-learning. This they felt helps them to look at things from different angles and develop a wider perspective by relating one subject to another.

Parents and teachers felt that since the children were not burdened with traditional examination system in Mirambika, learning was an enjoyable experience. Also, since getting marks is not their goal the students try to clear every concept before moving further. Parents felt that being in Mirambika the children get experiences of relating studies to real life like situations like visit to Safdarjung Airport while doing a project on aeroplanes or visit to an embassy while doing a project on Egyptian culture. Parents credited all these experiences to Mirambika and stated, 'had they been in any other school it would not have been possible, because of the bindings of the prescribed syllabus'.

Social Stars : Teachers find Mirambika children good at group work, and how to present and compile information. They also expressed that these children have the 'ability to outshine others' and have leadership qualities. Children's perceptions too substantiate this view as they expressed 'if a child has any problem they approach the Mirambika children to solve it'. According to the M.I.S teachers, Mirambika provides opportunities to each child to come forward which encourages independent behaviour in seeking solution to problems and issues. Teachers also expressed that these children are more emotionally stable than their counterparts as they get into fights fewer times, have the ability to resolve conflicts in class, see others perspectives and analyse their actions and behaviours.

Thinking Individuals : The parents and teachers view the children as individuals who try to find reasons for whatever they are doing and then put in their best efforts. According to the teachers nobody can force Mirambika children to do anything, the purpose and logic of performing the task should first be clear to the child. Children too feel that lack of teacher dependence forces them to find reasons or solutions to problems on their own which strengthens logical thinking. Also, experiences of relating themes to different subject areas helps the children in this direction. The ability of the children to be receptive and logical leads them being called 'thinking individual's by their teachers and parents.

Teachers in MIS are sensitive to the needs of Mirambika children and were not in favour of their joining traditional schools. As one teacher commented, 'it is like giving tight shoes to children and asking them to walk even if it hurts'

Humane Values : Parents opined that Mirambika children are simple, friendly, sensitive, honest and down to earth persons. They have respect for all kinds of work, experiences of cleaning, sweeping, washing their utensils in Mirambika helped to develop dignity of labour in them. Parents feel that their children are not materialistic or competitive neither they get mesmerized by superficial things in life. To 'show-off' is not in their nature, commented a parent.

'Mirambikan's are not jealous of others achievements instead try to improve one's own performance' This may be because learning in Mirambika focussed on highlighting individuality, cooperation and self-perfection. These views are further substantiated by students views on, what memories they have of Mirambika? Analysis of students responses are presented in Table 10.2.

Teachers though expressed that Mirambika children are sincere, honest and humble but felt that they were influenced to a large extent by western culture as evidenced in the way they dress, talk and behave. A few teachers were of the opinion that these children have a sense of superiority and do not want to conform to class norms. Thus it was felt was the result of 'too much freedom and independence which has made the children undisciplined and rude'. Certain set ways of behaving (such as non-conformity) probably leads to problems in adjustment.

It appears that the bottle-necks to adjustment of Mirambika children in MIS is the traditional teaching-learning set-up and the examination pattern. Because of their friendliness, confidence and responsible attitude and help from peers and teachers in MIS they learn to adjust within the first year of shifting. Students and parents were of the view that a child needs to be mentally prepared for the change and will then not face much adjustment problems.

Table 10.2

Student's responses to the question : What memories do you have of Mirambika?

S.No.	Responses	Number	
		Boys	Girls
1.	Like a home	1	2
2.	Project work/topic work was great	4	7
3	Very warm like a family	1	1
4	A Dream School I am lucky that I am/was a part of it.		1
5.	No tests was the best part		
6	Miss morning sports	2	
7.	We were given more personal attention	1	
8	So many memories that I can write a book on it		1
	• like a home		
	• friendly diyas (we used to hug them)		
9	No restrictions	3	1
10.	I never used to cry while going to MBK	1	
11.	Combined games for boys and girls	1	2
12.	My friends, may teachers	3	2
13	Lots of happy memories	1	
	• free to do whatever we wanted to do		
	• played a lot but at the same time learned too		
	• environment was learning type		
14	Our film 'Friendly Alien' got award	1	1
15.	It was great fun We studied also but it was never a burden as is in MIS		1
16.	No sections in MBK	1	
17.	Outings were fun	1	1
18.	Lots of trees, open classrooms, cake	1	1
19.	Trip to Kulu, National was fun	1	
20.	Building was great	1	
21	Lots of fun and play	4	1
22.	Miss nothing about MBK		1

SUMMARY

The study aimed at examining the process of schooling in Mirambika, a school based on the philosophy of free progress education as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo. The study, particularly focussed on understanding the school in terms of its transcendental and operative goals, with regard to (a) the organizational processes in terms of roles and responsibilities of various functionaries in the school, the decision making process and disciplinary practices; (b) the school culture in terms of the norms and values on which it is based; (c) the teaching learning encounters in relation to the syllabi, teaching -learning activities, innovative strategies used, and (d) the psycho-social characteristics and achievement of students who have joined Mother's International School (M.I.S.) after completing primary education in Mirambika.

Intensive participant observations were carried out by three investigators for a period of 8 months in Mirambika, a school which offers education upto primary level. Following an ethnographic approach, an 'intrinsic' case study of Mirambika was conducted. Ethnography requires the researchers to adopt an attitude of a student attempting to study a particular group or culture. Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people. It involves observation, discussion and reflection. A number of methods/techniques such as open ended interview, informal talk, participant observation, use of questionnaire, and examination of school records, etc., were employed to collect information. Triangulation helped in validating the observations. Methodological triangulation i.e. use of observation, interviews and questionnaires helped in cross-validating the observations made by three investigators in the school

Data was gathered over a period of 8 months in Mirambika from September '95 to April '96 during the 1995-96 academic session. A follow up of students in Mother's International School (M.I.S.) was conducted during the 1996-97 academic session. Observations were recorded in personal diaries maintained by the investigators. A vivid description of the events observed was noted in order to recreate the scene at a later stage. The observations were precise in terms of data, time, activity, the setting, participants, special observation or critical events. Anecdotes helped to collect data about uncommon occurrences.

Sampling of observation in the present study was difficult because of the nature of the school activities. Nevertheless, one complete project across different groups (classes) and other group specific projects undertaken in Mirambika, were intensively observed over a period of 8 months alongwith each class being observed for 'training' (formal teaching) atleast 8 to 10 times, i.e. approximately 20 hours. In addition to classroom observations, information was obtained from day-to-day meetings, faculty meetings on Saturdays and P.T.A meetings.

Only a few documents were available to the investigators for observation since the school officials expressed that regular written records of the meetings with the managing committee, boards, community etc. are not maintained. The school functions largely on verbal communication as media. The primary documentary sources were school news letters, admission documents, teacher recruitments, communication with parents and work done by the children. The secondary sources were the reports of B.Ed students related to school functioning. The major findings of the study are summarized in the following sections.

I Organisational Dynamics

Organisational dynamics in Mirambika are the result of absence of authority figure and delineating increased powers to all its members. This gives rise to equal power or status to people in school, which fosters work ethics that is characteristic of responsibility and commitment to work. Classroom climate can be best described as dominated by student-centered inquiries, teacher questioning and eliciting answers. Democratic flexibility and participation of children in teaching-learning encounters range from content selection and mode of learning to selection of resources and their utilisation. These are the result of the ideology of the school which allows increased decision making powers to the teachers and students. In work they function as equal status workers i.e. decisions are jointly taken by the teachers and the students in class. Mirambika is sustained by flexible organizational structure resting on a collective capacity for continual and conscious attention to make collaborative efforts grounded in shared ideological values.

An analysis of interactions encountered during our participant observation throws light on informal lines of communication between the teachers and students, 'power' or 'control' does not lie with the teacher and negotiations help to maximize students effort. The school provides opportunities for enriching the students' sense of commitment self-reflection and evaluation which is a step towards maintaining a good working relationship.

The focus in Mirambika is on developing "inner discipline" among students i.e. control of one's emotions and actions. This may be seen as schools' effort at providing education of the 'vital'. Activities like children shouldering responsibilities in serving food, looking after the sports equipment, providing medical aid for minor injuries, issuing books on their turn and solving the in-fights taking place in their respective groups, also speak of efforts to inculcate sense of responsibility, co-operation and self-discipline. The children are encouraged to form their own rules, and are then asked to adhere to them. Assigning responsibility on the children seems to be a popular disciplining strategy used in Mirambika which also helps them to become aware of their actions. This is derived from the schools philosophy which restrains teachers from encouraging conformity to a set of rules.

II Teaching Learning Encounters

The philosophy of Aurobindo and the Mother is well entrenched in the portals of Mirambika and permeates the academic and social climate of the school. Reverence for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo's thought is tangible in day-to-day activities, cultural functions and celebrations. Evidences to this were seen in the various pedagogic processes. The ideological goals of Mirambika purport child – centered view of providing education which serves as a pre-condition for espousing projects as suitable method of teaching and learning.

Project approach to learning followed by Mirambika sends messages of being interdisciplinary, integrating arts in the curriculum and leading to collateral learning. This is accomplished by providing an evolutionary syllabi emerging from the needs of students. Since projects are open-ended flowing in the direction determined by the children's interests rather than pre-determined schema, they tend to develop in students the skills of abstracting, inquiring, investigating and presenting the material. This makes the children independent, responsible and confident of their learning. It can be said that project approach provides opportunities to equip students with the kind of study skills that make them functional. Use of projects opens up alternatives in which work can be organised so that tasks are designed to fit each student's needs more closely while retaining the social context. Project work provides a climate and acclimatises the students to work in an atmosphere where they are less teacher-dependent, and to be able to decide the direction in which they should process. Organising work in class by way of projects blurs the distinction between subject areas and individual differences.

Mirambika's mode of assessment, though aims at providing a complete profile of the child, is primarily teacher's impressionistic judgement of the work done by the children. Evaluations are not related to grading, crediting or for upward mobility in school. Progress is purely measured against the student's own work or progress (self-referenced) and not used for comparison with other classfellows as the school believes in fostering cooperative learning and not competitive learning. The intentions of project work, in addition to cognition, is also the development of affective and conative aspects of behaviour.

Teacher's role is more of a facilitator, a generalist than a specialist. Many abandon the role of an initiator and simply react to events as they unfold. Fewer constraints operate on teachers and their success is not measured in relation to contents covered but calls for situational and personal control. Teaching style can be labelled as informal, participative and democratic. Though teachers profile clearly shows wide disparity among them in terms of qualifications, background, experience and expertise, what emerges is a strong consensus to work for the 'divine'. Teachers' turnover per year is also on the higher side (due to volunteers leaving and joining) which effects continuity of work in the groups, for which the school is aware and is constantly making efforts by holding regular in-house meetings to appraise the work done by children. Hence,

the approach to be successful needs to employ teaching methods that are flexible, ensure continuity and progression.

The school however, is constantly striving to maintain a balance between its two goals, transcendental and operative in terms of values, aims and beliefs through its various pedagogic processes and co-curricular activities

Academic Achievement

During the period of study 28 students of Mirambika were studying in Mothers International School (MIS) in classes VI to XII. It was found that students in class VI to VIII did not perform well in subjects like Hindi, Sanskrit (only 23% students got above average grades), probably because these subjects are not emphasised in Mirambika. The written expression of these students was also poor. As remarked by the teachers of MIS "the verbal expression of these students is wonderful, but when it comes to expressing in writing they face problems". This again is due to the fact that not much emphasis is given in Mirambika on written work. Students performed relatively better in subjects like English, Science and Social Studies, 69%, 54% and 56%, respectively. However in mathematics only 31% students performed above average. Teachers opined that Mirambika children were not good in taking tests and did not know how to prepare for examinations, this probably is due to absence of formal examinations in Mirambika.

At the time of the study 15 students from Mirambika were studying class IX to XII in MIS. Of these the results of 9 students in X & XII C.B.S.E. Examinations were studied. 3 students got 80% and above, 4 got 70% and above, and 2 got 60% and above. If success is related to having obtained more marks, the board results are a clear indication of Mirambika students having adjusted to the traditional pattern of oriented school evaluation.

The results are also suggestive of the need for pre-preparation and orientation of students from Mirambika to the teaching – learning – evaluations held in MIS or in any other traditionally oriented school. As evidenced in one group i.e. (XI of 1996-97) the students' performance was exceptionally good and were considered as the best batch of Mirambika students in MIS. These children were mentally prepared for the shift and were academically prepared for examinations, test taking and written work for one full year before joining MIS. All these together attribute to the success of these children. Better adjustment may also be due to difference in maturity level and age when the child shifts from Mirambika after Class V or Class VIII.

As regards the psycho-social characteristics, Mirambika children are perceived as 'armed with confidence' and 'being very confident', resourceful, adventurous, dynamic, and responsible. Teachers also perceived them as sincere and hardworking. These children are clear about their life goals and prioritise their work. They are also perceived as

social stars and information seekers. However, some teachers did perceive them as over confident and disobedient

In short, the study highlights the organizational dynamics in school, decentralized planning, emphasis on inculcating a sense of responsibility among students, child-centered syllabi according to the needs and capacities of the child, and the project approach to teaching-learning. However, since Mirambika, based on a particular philosophy, having its own organizational and practical concerns, access to numerous resources, teachers with a particular orientation, caters to a small population of highly select group of students coming from high socio-economic backgrounds and has a small student – teacher ratio, any attempt to replicate this project based system of teaching-learning in a conventional set-up may be done with caution

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